



THE WORLD OF  
SOMERSET MAUGHAM

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AN ANTHOLOGY EDITED BY  
KLAUS W. JONAS

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PETER OWEN LIMITED  
LONDON

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To I. B. J.

© Klaus W. Jonas, Frank Swinnerton,  
M. C. Kuner, St. John Ervine,  
Glenway Wescott 1959

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Somerset Maugham on his eightieth birthday  
(*By courtesy of Alan Searle*)

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Somerset Maugham, as a pupil at King's School, Canterbury,  
at the age of 10  
(*By courtesy of Alan Searle*)

## *Facing page 60*

Somerset Maugham in his bedroom at the Villa Mauresque,  
at the age of 78  
(*By courtesy of Edward Quinn*)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume is intended as a companion piece to *The Maugham Enigma*, an anthology of criticism, which was published in January 1954 on the occasion of W. Somerset Maugham's eightieth birthday. While the former consisted primarily of short review articles of individual books, the present volume is made up of a few lengthy essays by two British and three American writers. Mr. Maugham has written a preface in the form of a letter addressed to me in which he discusses his attitudes and reactions toward his critics.

The task of compiling this anthology was a very pleasant one thanks to the co-operation and enthusiasm of all contributors. Frank Swinnerton has allowed me to include his essay on "Somerset Maugham as a Writer," published originally in *John O'London's Weekly* of January 22, 1954, which traces Mr. Maugham's literary career.

In order to provide the reader with background information I decided to enlarge the biographical portrait. The original version of "The Gentleman from Cap Ferrat" appeared in 1956 in a very limited edition as the first in a series of publications issued by the Centre of Maugham Studies.

The three major sections of this volume contain discussions of the novels, short stories and travel books and plays.

Maugham's development as a novelist is presented with understanding by Dr. M. C. Kurer in her essay entitled "Maugham and the West. The human condition: bondage." All his novels are discussed in this essay, even the unpublished forerunner of *Of Human Bondage*, *The Artistic Temperament of Stephen Carey*, of which there exists only one manuscript copy in the Library of Congress in Washington. I must express my thanks to Dr. Kurer for her willingness to write this essay for the present volume, as it entailed interruption of other work.

My own section on "Maugham and the East. The human condition: freedom" discusses those writings which resulted from his journeys to the Far East. In the centre of this analysis are his highly regarded short stories, two of his travel books, a few novels and one drama. The method applied in the four short chapters which make up this discussion differs from the previous essay. Since most of these short stories and travel books dealing with Europeans in the East were written in the decade following World War I, my approach to them is not chronological but rather thematic.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The third section deals with Somerset Maugham's dramatic work. Since he himself has attached smaller importance to his plays, I felt justified in including a considerably shorter analysis of his work in this genre. I am very fortunate indeed that St. John Ervine has permitted me to include his estimate of the plays of Somerset Maugham. This paper was originally delivered on January 9, 1935, before the members of the Royal Society of Literature and subsequently published in *Life and Letters* of March 1935.

Glenway Wescott's "Maugham and Posterity" was originally published as an introduction to "The Maugham Reader." It first appeared in *Harper's Magazine*.

Mr. Maugham's secretary, Alan Searle, has been most kind and helpful in patiently answering many questions and providing most of the photographs of the author which appear in this volume.

The appendix contains "A Note on Maugham Collections," which describes some of the major archives for the study of Maugham's manuscripts in France, England and the United States. This is a revised and enlarged version of an article which I had first written for Volume III of the *Jahrbuch für Amerika-studien*, published in Heidelberg, Germany, and which was subsequently issued as Publication No. 2 of the Centre of Maugham Studies.

In the last decade since Mr. Maugham's retirement as a professional writer, there has been a sharp increase in critical studies about him. For reasons of space it was not possible for me to list more than a number of monographs. In addition to these there exist hundreds of articles and essays, several dozens of doctoral dissertations and Master's theses, and at least eight books of criticism or biography are in preparation. Most of the research is being done in Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Sweden and the United States. For more than sixty years he has provided pleasure and profit to millions of readers, and doubtless will continue to bring pleasure to future generations. He has never claimed greatness for himself, but his honesty, his craftsmanship and his gifts as a story teller and a dramatist will assure him a high place in English literature. Few writers of his generation have served their art so long and so well. It is my hope that this book may be a worthy tribute to Somerset Maugham as he enters into the eighty-sixth year of his life.

KLAUS W. JONAS.

*University of Pittsburgh.*

## PREFACE

*Villa Mauresque,  
St. Jean, Cap Ferrat, A. M.  
14th May, 1956.*

Dear Klaus,

It is a difficult job you have given me. I do not know whether you wish to place this piece you ask me to write as a preface to what you have written or as a postscript. I have a great dislike to reading anything that is concerned with myself or my works. Several books have been written about me; I have not read them. When first I had books published, I subscribed to a press agency, but when the first world war broke out it happened that I was here and there, and out of reach, and afterwards I took long journeys to distant countries. The result was that often I did not get my press cuttings for several weeks, and sometimes for months, after they had appeared. They came then in a large packet and I found them of no great interest. I ceased to subscribe to the agency and since then I have never read a review of anything I have written except when by chance I happened to find one in the newspaper I was reading. The advantage of that is that when I am told that an old friend of mine has violently attacked me in some paper I can greet him, when I run across him, with my usual cordiality. The fact is that when I have written something, corrected the proof and published it, I am no longer interested in it and don't really care what people say about it.

I have never pretended to be anything but a story writer. I have little patience with the novelists who preach or philosophise. I think it much better to leave philosophy to the philosophers and social reform to the social reformer. It has amused me to write stories, plays and novels. With the exception of the last war,

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when I was called upon to write propaganda, a thing for which I had no gift and so found a distressing burden, I have only written for my own pleasure. Do not suppose I mean by this that I have found it easy to write. Over and over again I have spent a whole day writing and rewriting a single page and in the end left it, not because I was satisfied with it, but because I could do no better. So far as I know, there are but two ways of writing English, the plain and the ornate. When I began to write, the ornate was in vogue and, as was natural in a very young man, I sought to follow it. I had no bent for it. After wasting a good deal of time, I came to the conclusion that it suited me better to eschew the flowery, the precious, the artificial, and to write as simply and naturally as I could, to write as far as possible as I would talk. I should like to think that I have not entirely failed. The most pleasing compliment I have ever received came from a G.I. in the last war who was stationed in New Guinea; he wrote to tell me that he had greatly enjoyed a book of mine that he had been reading because he had never had to look out a single word in the dictionary.

During the sixty years I have been writing, I have written a great deal. I have written over a hundred stories, between twenty and thirty plays and between twenty and thirty novels. It has been borne in upon me that a good many people are angry with me because my various works have brought me in a great deal of money. That is silly. They ought rather to be angry with the people all over the world who buy my books and pay to go to see my plays. I have written because I had a fertile invention and the ideas for plays and stories that thronged my brain would not let me rest till I had got rid of them by writing them. But that is a thing of the past. With age one's inventiveness leaves one and it is long since I have been troubled with any subject that insisted on being turned into a piece of fiction.

But I like writing. For well over half a century I have been in the habit of shutting myself up in a room every morning and writing till lunch time. Do you know the story of the elderly Frenchman who had been accustomed for twenty years to spend

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every evening with his mistress? One day a friend asked him: "But after all these years why on earth don't you marry her?" His face fell. "Where then should I spend my evenings?" he answered. I am like the elderly Frenchman; if I didn't write, how should I pass my mornings? I am well aware that I have lost any talent I may have had. There was only one thing for me to do—to turn critic.

Yours sincerely,  
W. S. MAUGHAM.

## SOMERSET MAUGHAM AS A WRITER

By Frank Swinnerton

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Swinnerton, Frank A. English novelist and critic. Born August 12, 1884. Author of *Nocturne* (1917), *Harvest Comedy* (1937), and *The Georgian Literary Scene* (1935).

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His longevity, at which we all rejoice, has been a great help to Mr. Maugham's reputation. If he had been taken from us untimely we might even now be lamenting the critical blindness of several generations; whereas the truth is that Mr. Maugham has passed into old age amid the cheers of youth and the happy envy of his contemporaries. Since his mind is full of irony I am sure that his pleasure in apotheosis is much sweetened by amusement.

He can hardly have expected the event; for a great deal of his life has been spent in the shadow of popular success and more eminent seniors. When he wrote his first novel, *Liza of Lambeth*, he caught a momentary fashion for tales of mean streets. When he observed the passing of the fashion he had already seen that it held nothing more for him; and his eye had turned from the novel of what is now called squalor to the much brighter scene of the theatre.

Giants, however, stood in his path. He has told us that in those days they were Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, and R. C. Carton. "For the rest the managers were content to depend on adaptations from the French or German." They did not want his first play, *A Man of Honour*.

In the end that play was produced by the Stage Society, with results which might have been expected. "The critics judged it according to their preconceptions. The more conventional abused it heartily; the earnest students of the drama praised it." It is possible that if Mr. Maugham had continued in the vein of *A Man of Honour* he could have enjoyed the esteem of a few, as

St. John Hankin did for plays of rather thin wit; but "I wanted money and I wanted fame."

Mr. Maugham was to learn that Hell hath no fury like a high-brow scorned. Not only were the comedies he next wrote great successes, but the earnest students of the drama resented his desertion of their cause; the eternal cause of appealing only to the select few. It was this desertion, although he did not know it, which led to his critical ostracism. The earnest knew his ambition. They said, in effect, "All for a handful of silver he left us."

Mr. Maugham continued to write novels which were favourably reviewed; but both in the novel and in the theatre he had eminent rivals, older than himself, who had been waiting for the change in taste which had set in after the Boer War and which became apparent to all after the overwhelming victory of the Liberal Party in the 1906 election. Plays of adultery still had their strong scenes in the West End; but Shaw, Galsworthy, and Granville Barker had, not long runs, but critical attention; Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy had risen to importance in the novel; Henry James and Joseph Conrad were the idols of readers for whom form and subtlety were the only excellences.

"I look upon it as very natural then," confessed Mr. Maugham, "that the world of letters should have attached no great importance to my work. In the drama I have found myself at home in the traditional moulds. As a writer of fiction I go back, through innumerable generations, to the teller of tales round the fire in the cavern that sheltered neolithic man."

He was not an innovator, moral or technical. Where Shaw, Galsworthy, and Wells concerned themselves with society, and directed attention to faults in its structure, Mr. Maugham's exceptionally keen eye was upon the follies of individuals. Since these others were "serious," he could only be regarded as flippant. He was regarded as flippant, trivial, cynical and non-constructive. His name was known; the earnest greatly enjoyed his plays in the theatre, because of course they were extremely amusing plays; but the British were in the mood for politics and sociology, and he was not. "I have most of my life been miserably conscious that I am not the average Englishman."

It was not that Mr. Maugham was swimming against the tide;



it was that he had not caught up with it. Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones realized that it had left them in mid-channel with other derelicts; Mr. Maugham, being younger than his rivals, and certainly gratified by immense popularity, felt much more cosmopolitan than they were, and perhaps assured himself that his fashion, too, would change. He was not a failure; he was a success. Only in the matter of prestige, in the matter of critical esteem, did he notice—quite philosophically—a little coolness.

That was inevitable. We had not then begun to use the word "highbrow," which I think came from the United States after the first World War; but the passing of the Victorian age, the humiliations of the Boer War, and, even then, some decrease in the size of the world, had made the English more generally conscious of European civilization than they had ever been.

Ibsen's plays were being performed in the West End, Hauptmann figured at the Court Theatre under Granville Barker's supervision, Strindberg had been heard of; and it had been discovered that Russia, as well as France, had a few novelists of note. George Moore, who preferred the French manner, had said that Dostoevsky was Gaboriau with psychological sauce; and Edward Garnett, in conversation with myself, described the same writer as a sort of Russian Dickens; but Turgenev was to be read in Mrs. Garnett's translations, Tolstoy was recognised as a monument, and a burning passion for Stendhal, Flaubert, and Maupassant was *de rigueur* among the intelligent young. What chance had Mr. Maugham against these enthusiasms?

Then came his juniors, the young men and women who had been born in the early or mid-eighties. Most of these were innocent of art; but they had read *The Way of All Flesh*, and were familiar with Shaw's milder ridicule of parents. They perceived that disguised or fantasticated autobiography, in which early experience could be used to colour chronological narrative, had well served their seniors—Wells with Dickensian fun and sociology, Galsworthy with class analysis, Bennett with humour-filled realism—and they joined in the task of what Henry James called "squeezing the orange," which meant, according to his more private definition, producing "fluid puddings" lacking all "form" and therefore all "art."

Such young men and women leapt at once into the public eye. When invited to discuss the current novel in weekly periodicals, those who did not write novels themselves spoke of two generations only. They did not think of Mr. Maugham. Even when Mr. Maugham produced *Of Human Bondage*, which is a very fine novel indeed, he could not immediately count upon its recognition. He was not a member of the younger set; and the younger set was concentrating upon one man, a genius, who for its members represented everything that was urgent in life, sex, the novel, and poetry. This man was D. H. Lawrence.

Mr. Maugham was unlucky in the fact that *Of Human Bondage* was published comparatively early in the war of 1914-1918, when other matters were blinding all eyes. That was a book which demanded undivided attention; and it made a greater stir in the United States than it did in England. Had it been published in 1910, it could not have failed to establish Mr. Maugham as a leader in a then influential school of fiction. By 1915, when the intellectual and aesthetic part of English society was torn between military or alternative service, it was, in the history of the novel, old-fashioned. Mr. Maugham had missed the bus by five or six years.

Unknown to the world, however, and unperceived by himself, he was soon to be overtaken by another bus. The change in himself had begun earlier, when he decided that there were other continents besides Europe from which material for his craft might be drawn. Former days in Paris had made him familiar with the ways of artists, and he had been much attracted, not by the paintings, but by the personality and actions of Gauguin. Gauguin had abandoned respectability and "gone native" in the South Seas; Mr. Maugham went to see for himself what Gauguin had seen.

The abandonment of conventionality, or the desire to become what, quoting Hazlitt, he called "the gentleman in the parlour," an anonymous loser of "importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity," seemed to offer fascinating new experience. The result of that interest in Gauguin's escape, and the wish to "become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties," was a new birth for Mr. Maugham. Its first literary product was *The Moon and Sixpence*.

*The Moon and Sixpence*, published in 1919, was a great success with the public which reads for curiosity; it was the real beginning of belief in Mr. Maugham as an original writer. Though still branded as "popular," he was seen to have a personal approach to life; and as the Post-Impressionists had hitherto been regarded as peculiarly the property of advanced culture this novel about Gauguin did much to suggest that if only Mr. Maugham had understood the art of the novel he might have done something excellent in that form.

At this time, according to my interpretation of *The Summing Up*, Mr. Maugham communicated to a celebrated critic what he thought were possible claims to esteem. The critic stated those claims in an article for which Mr. Maugham expressed little gratitude in *The Summing Up*. The article gave the first hint of coming glory.

The glory was not yet to arrive. In 1921 Abel Chevalley's *Le Roman Anglais de Notre Temps* merely named *Liza of Lambeth*, while giving extended attention to several writers younger than Mr. Maugham (including myself); in 1925 Virginia Woolf, attacking such seniors as Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy, whose work she described as "already a little chill," listed as the only significant novelists of the time James Joyce, E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, D. H. Lawrence, and T. S. Eliot. She did not mention Mr. Maugham. Even in its revised edition of 1930 the *History of English Literature*, by Legouis and Cazamian, brushed him off with dozens of lesser men; while Mr. A. C. Ward's *Twentieth Century Literature* (third edition, 1930) confined itself to unenthusiastic references to Mr. Maugham's plays, and the same author's *The Nineteen-Twenties* (also 1930) made no reference to him at all.

Nevertheless, *The Moon and Sixpence* had been observed. So, in the theatre, had *The Circle*, which was produced in 1921. Neither could wholly please those who confused professional authorship with prostitution, nor those who thought success incompatible with quality; but outside the narrow world of what Arnold Bennett used ironically to call "the élite" a stir of interest and admiration could be discovered. It was to deepen and spread.

It deepened especially because, having written a few short

stories in young manhood, and having noticed that people were making some fuss over a Russian writer named Chekhov whom he thought inferior to Guy de Maupassant, Mr. Maugham caught a sudden glimpse of the field in which his greatest triumphs have been gained. It so happened that as Kipling had ceased effectively to write short stories about the East there was a wonderful opening for "the teller of tales round the fire in the cavern."

This opening was largest of all in the United States, where *Of Human Bondage* had been received more enthusiastically than it had been in England. Mr. Maugham wrote short stories so pungent that after a while he had an entirely new popular reputation. In my view the shock of *Ashenden* in 1928 converted that popular reputation into something more.

Previous volumes of stories had enjoyed success: *Ashenden* proved unique. The stories in this book introduced Mr. Maugham himself; they were consummately told; critics, having unbent to them, were forced to read on with admiration. They talked among themselves. Having learned the word "escapism" from Freud or others, and having a useful cliché about "mere stories," they could not deny that Mr. Maugham had seen something of the world which was communicated in *Ashenden*. The book was thus neither pure escapism nor in any respect what Daisy Ashford had called "mere." It remained correct to patronize Mr. Maugham as one who in youth had taken the wrong turning; but patronage was coloured by admiration.

When *Ashenden* was followed by *Cakes and Ale*, an astringent novel in which the two chief characters were recognized as having been drawn with exquisite malice, in one case particularly from a living model familiar to all critics, Mr. Maugham for the first time became an important writer in their eyes. Within a year or so of its publication both John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett were dead; Shaw had retired to the country; Wells had lost his force. By 1935, when I wrote a book called *The Georgian Literary Scene*, it was natural to include Mr. Maugham, however partially and inadequately, as a serious writer.

The literary fashion was already changing. It changed still more rapidly when war came again, and when the problems of living in a world half-destroyed and soon likely to be made a

waste appalled those who survived. When Shaw and Wells proclaimed the sins of Victorian England, they spoke for the Edwardian conscience; theirs were the plays and novels of ideas. Galsworthy with his accounts of breeding and ill-breeding, class, race, and justice, carried this work towards practical humanitarianism. Bennett showed, as none of the others did, the working of time on society and human nature.

Since Mr. Maugham's interest was rather in the follies and pretences of individuals, and he carried the almost Gilbertian flippancy of Wilde into situations made familiar by Jones and Pinero, he could not hope, and did not hope, to be taken seriously as a social critic. He was amused; he had nothing to offer men and women to whom Shaw was a prophet.

Nor, since his early plays and novels followed conventional designs, could he win admiration from Henry James or Edward Garnett, for whom Turgenev was the great master of fiction and form, and what James called "the refinements and ecstasies of method" were the sole justifications of the novel.

"In my twenties the critics said I was brutal, in my thirties they said I was flippant, in my forties they said I was cynical, and in my fifties they said I was competent, and now in my sixties they say I am superficial."

They said all these things. Were they wrong to say them? It was Mr. Maugham himself who said, also in *The Summing Up*, "I am not my brother's keeper." He said "I do not seek to persuade anybody;" and these two remarks show why he could not enjoy the suffrages of the ethical and political schools. I have already quoted an explanation of his method of tale-telling round the cavern fire. In explanation of a later failure he said, further:

"The intelligent critics, the more serious novel readers, have since then given most of their attention to the writers who seemed to offer something new in technique, and this is very comprehensible, for the novelties they presented gave a sort of freshness to well-worn material and were a fruitful matter of discussion."

Now in Mr. Maugham's case the technique was, in novels, undistinguished by novelty. He several times used the comfortable method of Kipling and the early Henry James of explaining

from the wings; and in *Cakes and Ale*, which followed *Ashenden*, it was Mr. Maugham who appeared in the stories as knowing whatever was to be known. He showed the characters in action; he did not intensively study their mental processes. But Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot were all delving within; Mrs. Woolf with the poetic vagueness of one to whom sensitive impressions and memories were a delightful jumble making up consciousness, Joyce with sharp, destructive, egocentric humour and a passion for the manipulation of language as music, Mr. Eliot as a despairing conscience seeking to lose individual man in metaphysics. Mr. Maugham found all such manifestations distasteful.

"Of the other experiments that have been made the most important is the use of the stream of thought. Writers have always been attracted by the philosophers who had an emotional value and who were not too hard to understand. They were taken in turn by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bergson. It was inevitable that psychoanalysis should captivate their fancy."

He did not want to psycho-analyse those whom he met in his travels and brought to book. They were simple.

"On taking thought it seemed to me that I must aim at lucidity, simplicity and euphony. I have put these three qualities in the order of the importance I assigned to them."

Lucidity, then, was his lifelong aim. It is not a quality much comprehended by youth. Nor is the quality of detachment. Until quite recently, therefore, young men and women, especially those who were proud of their intelligence and learning, read Mr. Maugham without feeling any need to extol him.

To the metaphysical school of Mr. Eliot, however, has succeeded a generation which learned fatalism in the last very destructive war. This war affected not only soldiers; it came into every home as a daily, nightly threat of obliteration. It was everywhere, and incessant. It left whole populations shaken, and perhaps impatient of the abstract. Mr. Maugham, to the newer generation, represents nothing outside the daily; but he does not represent escape from the daily. He represents something lucid, something to be understood and enjoyed. "I have a clear and

logical brain, but not a very subtle nor a very powerful one." That is exactly what intelligent people now need in an author. In his eighties Mr. Maugham for the first time enjoys a popular admiration so great that critical admiration cannot resist it.

How long this state of affairs will last I do not know. Nor does Mr. Maugham. That his estimate is lucid and ironic cannot be questioned.

© *Frank Swinnerton* 1959.

# THE GENTLEMAN FROM CAP FERRAT

By Klaus W. Jonas

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Jonas, Klaus W. Associate Professor of Modern Languages, University of Pittsburgh, and Curator of the Centre of Maugham Studies. Born June 22, 1920, in Stettin, Germany. Author of *A Bibliography of the Writings of W. Somerset Maugham*, 1950; *Somerset Maugham und der Ferne Osten*, 1953; *The Maugham Enigma*, 1954; *Carl Van Vechten: A Bibliography*, 1955; *Fifty Years of Thomas Mann Studies*, 1955.

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At eighty-five, William Somerset Maugham is truly one of the world's great writers. Few authors have had such a varied production, created so vast a number of unforgettable characters, or invented such a great many stories. Hardly any other living writer can claim to have attained eminence in so many distinct literary forms: the novel, short story, literary and art criticism, essay, book of travel, and, in co-operation with others, the screen play. Millions of television fans like his witty, humorous comments when he introduces the characters of his own stories. Maugham is the editor of *The Ten Greatest Novels of the World* and of *A Choice of Kipling's Prose*. His six popular anthologies reveal an almost unparalleled knowledge of the literatures of England, America, France, Germany, and Russia. Finally, he is a well-known lecturer who has addressed many learned societies, academies, and students in famous universities both in Europe and in America. These are but some of the activities of "the old party" who, in his ninth decade, appears as young, healthy, and full of vitality as a man in middle years, continuing his habit of travel and writing which he has followed for the past sixty years.

In spite of his age, Maugham is still a temperamental, sinewy, and imposing character who looks very fit. His voice is that of a kind, wise man, but his glance reveals that he harbours few illusions concerning himself and others. In contrast to many other



famous personalities you would scarcely notice him in a large company, but you would assuredly be noticed by him. His secret for this amazing youthfulness: (1) keep sober, (2) work hard, (3) not do anything for too long.

Maugham's face, though wrinkled, is tanned, and in repose possesses the inscrutability of a Chinese mandarin, which Graham Sutherland depicted so strikingly on his oil portrait, now in the Tate Gallery in London. Maugham found the picture, with its hot and bright colours, "magnificent." "There is no doubt," he remarked, "that Graham has painted me in a mood and with an expression I sometimes have, even without being aware of it."

I have known "Willie" Maugham for a good many years, both in America and in his home at Cap Ferrat, and more than once people have asked me whether there was such a thing as a "Maugham enigma." His "mysterious" personality has given rise to innumerable legends. Very few people, I believe, really know Maugham. He is extremely reticent about himself and never speaks of his work unless you ask him point blank. Then he will politely answer your questions. In preparing a study of his exotic fiction I had to ask him innumerable questions regarding the influence of his travels upon his life and work. Although the personal questioning was undoubtedly tedious and lengthy, no one could have shown greater patience, fuller understanding, or given more effective help.

And yet, the number of readers, and especially critics, who call him cynical, bitter and cruel, are legion. Occasionally, it is true, there are signs of irritability in Maugham. It is hard for many to reconcile his so-called "brutality" with the kindly, charitable, humane man he actually is. Maugham himself is somewhat amused by all this talk about his enigmatic personality. The many paradoxes which are characteristic of him are not out of line with a man who has always wished to live his own life and to do as he pleased.

The master of English prose learned to speak French before he spoke English; the English gentleman who likes no country better than Spain, where he is the most popular English author, has long made his home in southern France; the man who first suffered from tuberculosis, of which his mother died when he was

eight and who, in his early forties, spent two years in a sanatorium in Nordroch-on-Dee, Scotland, was a good tennis player and swimmer until late in his seventies. He has called his life unexciting and in no way adventurous though in the East he was once shot at by bandits, nearly drowned during a stay in Borneo, and twice very nearly died of malaria.

Contradictory are also the opinions of his critics who, in his twenties, said he was brutal, in his thirties flippant, in his forties cynical, in his fifties competent, and then in his sixties, superficial.

"It has happened to me from time to time to run into some person of taste who tells me that I ought to take Somerset Maugham seriously. Yet I have never been able to convince myself that he was anything but second-rate . . . My experience with Maugham has always been that he disappoints my literary appetite and so discourages me from going on." Thus wrote Edmund Wilson who feels that Maugham "is for our day what Bulwer-Lytton was for Dickens's: a half-hashy novelist, who writes badly, but is patronized by half-serious readers who do not care much about writing." Gerald Sykes, who admires Maugham's enormous gifts as a craftsman, suggests that sinister influences vitiated his abilities. "What metamorphosis took place? Were his desires worldly from the start, was he fired originally with no artist's longing to see and make, but with an earthling's lust to dine well and glitter? Or was a man of genius, a virgin heart, seduced by the great world of riches and power? Woe to thee, Babylon, that mighty city!" I know of no critic who has less respect for Maugham than Morton Dauwen Zabel who, in reviewing one of his lighter novels, quotes Mr. Clifton Fadiman as saying that "it does not contain a wasted word," only to conclude by adding: "the fact has seldom been more deftly reversed—all the words are wasted!"

On the other hand there are those serious critics who believe in Maugham's permanent place in literature. They include Richard A. Cordell, Irwin Edman, S. N. Behrman, Richard Aldington, Cyril Connolly, Charles Morgan, Paul Dottin, Helmut Papajewski, and many others. Somerset Maugham has been called "the most creative talent in the field of the English novel." None

of his fellow-writers, I think, has been praised as highly and condemned as completely as the gentleman from Cap Ferrat who has "gone his own way, with a shrug of the shoulders, following the path he has traced, trying with his work to fill out the pattern of life he has made for himself."

Maugham, as everyone knows, was born of British parents on January 25th, 1874, in Paris where his father was attached as solicitor to the British Embassy. At ten, after the death of both his parents, the carefree, pleasant, elegant life in the French capital came to a sudden end. He was sent to live with his puritan clergyman uncle, Rev. Henry MacDonald Maugham, Vicar of Whitstable, in Kent, whose portrait he painted to vividly in *Of Human Bondage*, and his German born wife Sophie, daughter of Baron von Scheidlin. His school years in Canterbury where he attended King's School, were unhappy as he felt tormented because of a physical defect. Through most of his life he suffered from a bad stammer which caused him a great deal of trouble. Until late in the thirties he firmly declared that he would never speak in public, and that nothing could ever induce him to speak into a microphone. Beginning in 1940, however, a treatment he underwent was so successful that he began to make an occasional public address, and shortly thereafter he made the first of a number of radio talks.

Of Maugham's five brothers, two had died in infancy, while three went into the law. His uncle wanted him to go to Oxford to prepare for the ministry. However, his stammer proved such a handicap that he preferred medicine instead. Before entering St. Thomas's Hospital across the Thames from the Houses of Parliament in London's slum district Lambeth, he enjoyed an intellectually liberating year in Heidelberg, attending lectures in its old University without being officially enrolled as a student, and travelling to Munich and Italy. He often referred to this time as the happiest year of his life, and some fifty years later when I happened to live in that city and sent him a book of Heidelberg pictures he wrote that "they made me feel very sentimental."

In London Maugham studied just enough medicine in his first two years to pass his examinations. He spent all his spare time reading and writing. His interest in medicine only began

with his work in the wards and his clerkship in the outpatient's department. It was here that he first came into actual contact with "human nature." In the three weeks he spent as obstetric clerk he attended sixty-three confinements and proved so competent that he was offered a permanent appointment when he was twenty-three years old. The influence of his medical studies upon his whole development can hardly be overestimated. Through his work among the poor he gained insight in human suffering, brutality, and courage, and out of these experiences he wrote his first novel, *Liza of Lambeth*.

Of his years as a medical student Maugham writes in *The Summing Up*: "In those three years I must have witnessed pretty well every emotion of which man is capable . . . I saw how men died. I saw how they bore pain. I saw what hope looked like, fear and relief; I saw the dark lines that despair drew on the face; I saw courage and steadfastness. I saw faith shine in the eyes of those who trusted in what I could only think was an illusion and I saw the gallantry that made a man greet the prognosis of death with an ironic joke because he was too proud to let those about him see the terror of his soul . . . The experience of all the years that have followed has only confirmed the observations on human nature that I made, not deliberately, for I was too young, but unconsciously, in the outpatient's department and in the wards of St. Thomas's Hospital. I have seen men since as I saw them then, and thus have I drawn them."

Maugham regrets that he did not practice medicine for any length of time. This, he believes, would have given him many valuable experiences which he could have used as a writer. "So far as I personally am concerned," he once remarked, "I can only wish that I had remained a doctor for three or four years instead of writing books which have long been as dead as mutton."

After he was qualified, in 1897, and had become a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, he went to Spain, enjoying an idyllic love affair in Seville, which he prefers to most cities in the world. When the inheritance and the legacy he had received some years before were used up, he started his career as a professional writer to establish a reputation and to make a living. The reputation

has always come first. In 1925 he remarked to his literary agent: "I am not so anxious to make a large sum of money out of a book as to have it as widely read as possible. I seek distinction rather than lucre."

For some time Maugham lived in a small flat in Montparnasse. Life in Paris was cheap in those days. He dined regularly with a group of painters, sculptors, and writers, among them Arnold Bennett and Gerald Kelly, at the Chat Blanc in the rue d'Odessa. But those were years of continuous struggle and extreme poverty: his plays, with one or two exceptions, were unproduced, his short stories and novels, though published, unappreciated. His yearly income never amounted to more than what is now about £175. The turning-point came in 1907 when *Lady Frederick* suddenly became a smash hit. Within three months he had four plays running in London. Overnight he found himself a famous, popular playwright, and in 1911 he bought a small house at 6, Chesterfield Street, Mayfair. "It was fortunate for me," he says, "that I suddenly achieved popularity as a dramatist and so was relieved of the necessity of writing a novel once a year to earn my living. I found plays easy to write; the notoriety they brought me was not unpleasing, and they earned for me enough money to enable me to live less straitly than I had been obliged to. I have never had the bohemian trait of being unconcerned for the morrow. I have never liked to borrow money. I have hated to be in debt. Nor has the squalid life had any attraction for me. I was not born in squalid circumstances."

Maugham took his success as it came, and made up his mind "that, having but one life, I should like to get the most out of it." Thus he decided to save money quietly, methodically, so that never again would he have to be poor and defenceless and hungry.

But the memories of his unhappy youth gave him no peace, and in 1912 he started rewriting an unpublished novel completed in 1898 for which the publisher refused at that time to give him £100 advance royalty. The book which he had first called *The Artistic Temperament of Stephen Carey*, was published in 1915, under the title *Of Human Bondage*. Theodore Dreiser praised

it enthusiastically in *The New Republic*, and Maugham's fame as a master of the English novel was established.

At the outbreak of the first World War he became a member of a Red Cross ambulance unit in France and worked for some time as a dresser, then as an ambulance driver. But soon the Intelligence Department needed his particular qualifications, and for the next two years he served his government as a Secret Agent, at first in Geneva, Switzerland, later in Russia on a special mission to prevent the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution. Maugham has never made any compromise with the Communists. Consequently his plays are banned in Soviet Russia where he is now a forbidden author just as he was in Nazi Germany where his name was among the first on Dr. Goebbels's black list.

Maugham's romantic war-time marriage, in 1916, to Gwendolen Syrie Barnardo ended in divorce in 1929. His wife's father, Dr. Thomas John Barnardo, was the founder and director of the large philanthropic institutions by which, during his lifetime, over 55,000 orphan waifs were rescued, trained, and placed out in life. She had previously been married to Henry Solomon Wellcome, later Sir Henry, outstanding British archæologist and scientist. When Mrs. Syrie Maugham died in July, 1955, at the age of seventy-six, one of her old friends, Sir Osbert Sitwell, wrote: "My mind goes back to the time many years ago when I first went to the hospitable house of Mrs. Maugham and her brilliant husband. They were always particularly kind to the young and gifted. There, in Wyndham Place, in a large beige-painted, barrel-vaulted drawing-room of this eighteenth-century mansion, their friends were privileged to meet all the most interesting figures connected with the world of art, literature, and the theatre in both England and America. In later years the talent which Mrs. Maugham had always shown in the furnishing of her own home found a commercial outlet. She soon launched many fashions in interior decoration and was responsible for many schemes of adornment here and in the United States, where she was extremely well known. The old house which she occupied in King's Road, Chelsea, in the thirties, exemplified many of her ideas. Without spoiling it in any way, she made it truly her own

and in it gave many delightful parties which her friends will long remember with pleasure."

The only child of the marriage of Somerset and Syrie Maugham, Elizabeth, was born in 1917. Both her parents have always been uniquely devoted to her. She was first married, on July 20, 1936, to Vincent Rudolph Paravicini whose father served as Swiss Minister to the Court of St. James until 1939. During the second World War, she and her two children went to America to escape the London blitz while her husband was serving in the British Armed Forces. After her divorce from Paravicini, Liza married, in 1948, Lord John Hope, a British M.P., whose father, the Marquess of Linlithgow, was once Viceroy of India. In 1950 Maugham's third grandchild, Julian John Somerset, was born, and in 1952 the fourth one, Jonathan Charles. When speaking of his "family" Maugham usually refers to his daughter and her children whom he sees quite frequently in their London home.

Maugham has survived his five brothers. One of them died recently, in March 1958, at the age of ninety-one: Frederick Herbert, an eminent lawyer, who, in 1938, was appointed Lord Chancellor of Great Britain and later was created Viscount Maugham of Hartfield. His only son, Robert Cecil Romer, the present Lord Maugham, has also made a name for himself as a writer. During the last war he was a tank captain in Egypt until he was wounded, and later he visited the countries of North Africa to observe the growth of Arabian nationalism. His books are largely based on his wartime experiences with the British Intelligence in the Middle East and are quite successful both in England and in the U.S.A.

Maugham has always been fond of travelling but in his youth he could only make brief and economical journeys to France, Spain, Italy, and Greece. In the first World War, however, he had a chance of visiting the South Seas and America, and since then he has seen almost all parts of the world except South Africa. The settings of his narratives include Samoa, Tahiti, Singapore, Borneo, Hawaii, Dutch New Guinea, the Federated Malay States, China, Siam, French Indo-China, India, Australia, the West Indies, Paris, London, the Riviera, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Canada, New York, Chicago, Russia. Most of his work written in



Somerset Maugham, as a pupil at King's School, Canterbury.





the twenties dealt with the countries "East of Suez," with British colonials as his main characters. When his collection of short stories, entitled *Ah King*, was published in 1933, he wrote to a friend in New York: "I am grateful to you for your grand review. I think it is very wonderful that you never seem to get tired or stale but preserve your interest and enthusiasm unimpaired. It shows great vitality of mind. I am particularly pleased that you like this volume of stories because with it I bring to an end my essays in what is termed for some reason exotic fiction. I have done everything in that line that I am inclined to and it is satisfactory to hear that I have brought this side of my work to an end without falling off."

In 1929 Maugham bought his Villa Mauresque, at St. Jean, Cap Ferrat, in the Alpes Maritimes, a home of great beauty and comfort. There may be more luxurious villas in the world but none can compare with it in civilized living. Cap Ferrat, a finger of land stretched out into the Mediterranean between Nice and Monaco, was once owned by King Leopold II of Belgium. Among Maugham's neighbours on the Cap are Bao Dai, former Emperor of Indo-China, Charlie Chaplin, and Jean Cocteau, the playwright. The villa had been built by a Catholic bishop who had spent most of his life in Algeria. On the entrance-wall appears the old Moorish insignia which, for a number of years, Maugham has used on his books, letter paper, fireplaces, radiator grills, cigarette cases, and match boxes. The symbol originated in the Atlas Mountains and his father first discovered it in Morocco. In Africa this sign is thought to ward off the Evil Eye and is understood to be a stylization of the human hand. "Apparently," says Maugham, "it works. This has been a very happy house." Villa Mauresque has a patio, surrounded by terraced gardens rising to a swimming-pool which overlooks the Mediterranean. In his study, a penthouse on the villa, he has a Gauguin which he discovered in a dilapidated hut on Tahiti at the very moment when native children were scraping off the colour with knives. Maugham has presented to the National Theatre his famous collection of paintings of eighteenth-century actors, but he still has a number of masterpieces by such artists as Monet, Renoir, Degas, Rouault, Matisse, Utrillo, Sisley, Toulouse-Lautrec,

Chagall and Marie Laurencin, one of his ardent admirers. He is especially fond of "The Dying Pierrot" by Picasso, and a picture of a naked athlete, an early work of Toulouse-Lautrec. In former years he sometimes offered £5 to any of his visitors who could determine the name of the painter of this little known picture.

In the past there were usually a few interesting people staying with Maugham in the Villa Mauresque. Though he has never sought the company of the great and celebrated, it was they who looked upon it as a favour to be among his guests. These included, at various times, such people as the late King of Sweden, the King of Siam, the Ex-Queen of Spain, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, the Maharanee of Baroda, the Aga and Begum Khan, and among politicians his friend Sir Winston Churchill and Herbert Morrison. And of course many authors, American and English, S. N. Behrman, Glenway Wescott, S. J. Perelman, Moss Hart, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, Sir Desmond MacCarthy, J. B. Priestley, Elizabeth Russell, Rudyard Kipling, Michael Arlen, Noël Coward, among others. Except for his daughter, Lady John Hope, and his four grandchildren, he seldom has house guests any longer. Most people, he feels, do not understand that the villa is his working place, that a writer works all the time even when he is not writing, and that any disruption of his daily routine seriously disturbs him in his work.

At the outbreak of the second World War Maugham served again with the Intelligence Department in France. In June, 1940, he escaped on one of the last boats, a collier packed with refugees. Though it had accommodation only for thirty-eight, it carried over five thousand refugees from Nice to London during three harrowing weeks. Food was scarce, the morale was low, but Maugham kept it up by telling stories to anyone who cared to listen, jammed about him on the open decks. In the autumn of 1940 he went to the United States under an agreement with the British Government, and remained until 1946. He spent his winters at Parkers Ferry, at Yemassee, South Carolina, a cottage on the plantation of Nelson Doubleday, his publisher; his summers in the Colonial Inn at Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard. Each

spring and autumn he lived for some time in the Ritz-Carlton in New York.

He has twice returned to America since his return to Villa Mauresque which, during the war, the Italians sacked, the Germans occupied, the French looted, and the Americans used as a convalescent home.

He is still a great traveller. In 1951 he motored through Spain, Portugal and Morocco, later to Italy, in 1952 he visited the Netherlands to study Dutch paintings in the museums at The Hague, Haarlem and Amsterdam, received an honorary doctor's degree at Oxford University—after Toulouse had thus honoured him in 1939—and underwent an emergency operation in Lausanne, Switzerland. In his eightieth year he visited again some of those countries in which he had been happy in his youth, Greece and Turkey, and then Germany where he stayed near Bayreuth and enjoyed eight operas and a concert in nine days. In 1954 he travelled to Italy and Spain and flew over to London for a private audience with Queen Elizabeth who conferred on him the order of Companion of Honour. Two years ago he spent a month in Egypt, in a country house outside Cairo, lent to him by his friend, the Aga Khan. Each spring he drives to Florence and Venice and then to Austria for his cure in Bad Gastein, and in the autumn spends three months in London. In 1957 he returned, for the first time in sixty-five years, to Heidelberg where he had once lived as a student. The University gave a dinner in his honour, he was asked to kick off a football at a game between the members of the press and the theatre, and he took part in a real "Studenten-Kneipe" (beer-drinking party) arranged for him by the students. He is now so used to receiving honours wherever he goes that it is hard to imagine how different this was some twenty years ago. When he went to India he was neglected by the snobbish British colony in Bombay until, finally, a dowager condescended to speak to him at a large reception. "Mr. Maugham," she hazarded, "could you by any chance be related to Lord Maugham, the Lord Chancellor?" "Yes," he said, "he's my brother." The dowager summoned her friends. "This Mr. Maugham," she informed them breathlessly, "is the brother of the Lord Chancellor!" Then, with hardly a pause, she said to

Mr. Maugham: "Will you come to lunch on Wednesday?" Maugham politely declined the invitation.

Somerset Maugham is fortunate in having had, for the past thirty years, the most loyal, devoted and efficient secretary as his constant companion: Mr. Alan Searle. In 1954, Alan Searle was twice faced with the overwhelming task of answering the best part of twelve hundred congratulatory letters and telegrams: first, on the occasion of Maugham's eightieth birthday, in January; and then, a few months later, when he received an honour in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

For a long time Maugham has been interested in helping talented young writers, and in the early thirties had expressed a desire to found a prize to enable young literary men to travel and so improve their work. At that time he had been hoping to sell his manuscripts—amounting in all to fifty pieces—for £17,500. But his negotiations with a New York dealer were unsuccessful, and instead of selling them he gave most of his manuscripts away to friends, relatives, and institutions. His ever rising income enabled him to set up, in 1947, a £17,000 trust fund to finance travel abroad for promising young English writers. Interest on the fund—about £400—is awarded yearly to one British writer under thirty-five who has had one book published.

Much has been said about Maugham's fabulous royalties. He himself estimates that through his writings he has earned some £1,350,000. His great wealth has even given him the privilege of once refusing a \$250,000 offer from Hollywood. On another occasion he was offered a large sum from a leading British magazine for three essays on Britain, France, and the United States. He declined the offer with the comment: "Where would I live after I wrote them?"

"If I had died twenty-four years ago when I was sixty," he said recently, "I think I would have been forgotten now. You see, a very strange thing has happened to me in the past ten years. During that time I have produced nothing of consequence—yet I have had more success than ever before. My collected stories have sold close to 300,000 copies in a year. You know how funny the English are about old age—once they take someone to their hearts, they are loyal to the last, whether it's a singer who has

lost his voice, or an actor who forgets his lines. That seems to have happened to me!" Maugham's books have long had an excellent sale. By the middle of 1950, according to his American publishers, a total of 4,339,520 copies of the various editions of his novels, stories and plays had been sold. The best seller of them all was *The Razor's Edge*, published in 1944, which had sold 1,367,283 copies. *Of Human Bondage* has never sold fewer than 30,000 copies in any of its first thirty years. It is estimated that altogether his sales throughout the whole world have amounted to close on forty million copies.

Maugham had known poverty in his youth, and has always had a respect for money which is "like the sixth sense without which you cannot make use of the other five." Into a first edition of *Of Human Bondage* he once wrote: "He heard people speak contemptuously of money; he wondered if they had ever tried to do without it."

In 1925 he wrote to his American agent Charles Hanson Towne about his publisher, George H. Doran: "I do not wish Doran to look upon me as a goose who lays regularly a golden egg. He has never failed to make money out of the books of mine which he published, but I do not see why he should sit down on that gratifying fact and do nothing for me . . . There is only one way I know by which a publisher can guarantee success, and that is by giving so large an advance that it is necessary for him to do everything he can for the book to get his money back."

Maugham's correspondence with his publisher shows that he is both a businessman and a gentleman. "I am obliged to you," he wrote in 1916 to Miss Morse of George H. Doran, "for the contract . . . I notice it is for two volumes of short stories and no mention is made of novels. Am I to understand by your only sending this contract that there is none for any future novels; or is there another contract which you have omitted to send? If so, kindly forward it at once. If, however, there is a clause about novels in the contract you have sent me which you have inadvertently omitted I shall look upon it as a favour if you would make me a more exact copy. Yours faithfully, W. S. M." And in 1926 he writes to her from Capri: "Dear Miss Morse, I am obliged to you for sending me back 'The Judgement Seat.' I had

an idea that it might wound the susceptibilities of the editors, and so bear its return with fortitude. I thank you also for your extremely kind letter. I am very much pleased that Mr. Doran has been so generous as to insert a clause in his contract which makes it less unsatisfactory to me."

Maugham has always kept cordial relations with both his publishers and agents, as is shown by this letter, written in 1928, to Towne who had just caused him a considerable disappointment:

"My dear Charlie:

I will not conceal from you that I am extremely vexed at your having signed an agreement with Doran which gives me nothing that I wanted but on the contrary takes away what I value most dearly, my freedom of action . . . Although I have felt bound to express my disapproval of your treatment of me as an agent by terminating my connection with the American Play Company, I hope that this step of mine will cause no break in the friendly, cordial relations we have always had. I see no reason why it should. Though I consider you too arbitrary to be an agent I continue to think you a charming and amicable companion. Yours always, Willie."

A year later, after finishing *Ashenden*, he wrote to Towne: "It would be good to see you again, Charles, and I have an 1868 Brandy which is worthy of such an occasion as well as a 1911 Paul [sic] Roget waiting to bubble in your glass . . ." About his new book he reports to his former literary agent in New York: "Doubleday is bringing it out, and though I rather shrink from his including it in his 'Crimes Library' it has the compensation of ensuring a good sale. After all if the public are a mass of idiots, why should we not try to please them?"

In December, 1933, he writes to dear "Charles Handsome"

"I am taking a rest now by working at the life and literature of Spain in the sixteenth century, and when I have got the material ready I am looking forward to writing a book on that place and time on the same lines as *The Gentleman in the Parlour*.

Your letter is very reticent and you tell me nothing about yourself except that you write. I am glad to think that you have

been doing some short stories. I have always found it a very engaging path of literature. But you tell me nothing of your life. I am afraid that you like the rest of us have been badly hit by the crisis but I know you are a wise man and have never asked too much of life. I hope you are happy.

It is true that Gerald [Haxton] broke his neck two or three years ago and if he had been a decent and respectable person he would certainly have been killed but being neither he made a wonderful recovery and is now as well as ever. The only thing is that perhaps he cannot turn his head in the street to look back on someone who has caught his fancy as spryly as his wont. Yours affectionately, Willie."

What Mr. Maugham owes to America he himself has expressed in his address before the Library of Congress on his presentation of the original manuscript of *Of Human Bondage*. He has innumerable admirers in the U.S.A.

Maugham has played bridge with President Eisenhower and Charles Goren; he owes much to such great actresses as Ethel Barrymore, Billie Burke, and Katharine Cornell; he enjoys the company of Ruth Gordon and her husband Garson Kanin, and was fond of the late Lee Shubert, Broadway producer and theatre owner. He has the highest admiration for an American writer whose novel *The Tattooed Countess* is one of his favourite books: Carl Van Vechten, to whom he once inscribed a copy of one of his books: "To dear Carlo, of whom not enough good can be said."

Maugham frankly admits that he is a hedonist, a pleasure-seeker; he vigorously defends his luxurious and aristocratic tastes and his conviction that the best is just good enough for him. He works with concentration for three hours in the morning, then lunches, sleeps, walks, swims, reads, talks, dines, plays bridge or gin rummy, listens to good music, and goes to bed at ten-thirty. He does no serious drinking and smokes moderately.

Of all the charges levelled against him by his critics, none has hurt him more than that of cynicism. "All I have done," he says, "is to bring to prominence certain traits that many writers shut their eyes to. It has amused me that the most incongruous traits should exist in the same person—crooks who are capable



of self-sacrifice, harlots for whom it was a point of honour to give good value for money. I cannot bring myself to judge my fellows, I am content to observe them . . . There is nothing more beautiful," he feels, "than goodness, or loving-kindness, and it has pleased me often to show how much of it there is in persons who by common standards would be relentlessly condemned. I have shown it because I have seen it. It has seemed to me sometimes to shine more brightly in them because it was surrounded by the darkness of sin."

His philosophy of life is that of a humourist who likes nothing more than tolerance: "You are not angry with people when you laugh at them. Humour teaches tolerance, and the humourist with a smile and perhaps a sigh, is more likely to shrug his shoulders than to condemn. He does not moralize, he is content to understand, and it is true that to understand is to forgive and pity."

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## MAUGHAM AND THE WEST

The Human Condition: Bondage

By M. C. Kuner

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Although a few authors have crossed the border from narrative to dramatic art (or *vice versa*), the result of their tours too often marks them aliens. But Somerset Maugham is something of a phenomenon: like a violinist equally skilled in pianoforte technique, he can adapt himself to whatever medium he chooses. Curiously enough, in each of these forms he has displayed a different personality: the stage knows him as an artificer of drawing-room comedy, the short story as a conjurer of the enigmatic East, and the novel as a reporter of humanity's fetters. Totalled up, these varying aspects might well be called 'The Three Faces of Maugham.' In the following pages, it is Maugham the Novelist who will command our attention.

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Maugham's pre-occupation has been largely with the leisure class with which he is most familiar both by birth and achievement. In only one novel has he dealt with the lower strata, yet though he moves within it more easily than did Trollope among men and women of fashion, he prefers to study 'our betters,' as he wryly calls them in one of his most brilliant comedies, for it is in this atmosphere that he can best employ his gift of satire. His chronicles of Edwardian-Georgian England are accurate mirrors of their day, monuments to an almost extinct world that has been shunted aside by two wars and such 'angry' young novelists as Kingsley Amis and John Wain—both of them, ironically, winners of the Somerset Maugham Award for Literature.

In contrast to his short stories, the setting for most of Maugham's novels is Europe; the few books which unfold in far-off lands follow the late nineteenth-century trend towards exoticism. Maugham's treatment of this subject, though superficially resembling that of Melville, Stevenson, Conrad and Loti, is peculiarly his own. He is an escapist only in order to study individuals stripped of the confining influences of civilisation, even as Wordsworth sought the countryside the better to understand humanity. Though Maugham is beguiled by the strangeness and the mystery of the East, he does not use them to project his dream-impressions; rather they serve for the most part as backdrops for his novels. With him, as with the French painters of his age, Man occupies the centre of the stage, while landscape is a decor to physical or intellectual activity.

Although Maugham has fashioned diverse novels out of the material he has gathered, there are three themes which run like leit-motifs through all his works. In the realistic tradition, they deny the sentimental concepts of love, success and failure, good and evil. The first and dominant theme is that of unrequited love which most frequently is developed as a tragedy destructive to the participants. The unfortunate passion of Philip for Mildred in *Of Human Bondage*, of Erik for Louise in *The Narrow Corner*, of Walter for Kitty in *The Painted Veil* are but three examples of an imposing list.

Another favourite subject is the discrepancy between appearance and reality, one, incidentally, dear to the hearts of all turn-of-the-century writers, including Sigmund Freud. In Maugham's novels a pillar of the law and church is almost always a thief, a swindler, a wine-bibber or an adulterer. Conversely, the promiscuous woman usually has the familiar heart of gold, and the cheat and fugitive from justice is both humane and generous. Rosie, the heroine of *Cakes and Ale*, though far from chaste, is the most attractive character in the book; while the second Mrs. Driffield, a mounted specimen of propriety, exasperates and alienates the reader from beginning to end.

Equally prominent in his writings is the non-conformer who battles a disapproving world. The revolt may be occasioned by art (in *The Moon and Sixpence*, Charles Strickland casts away

his material goods to pursue his mission of painting); or by a vision (in *The Razor's Edge*, Larry becomes what practical souls term a slacker because he wants to understand the meaning of the universe and to spend his time in quest of wisdom rather than wealth). Whatever the form, the rebel is a constant source of interest to Maugham, who confesses himself drawn to 'the men, few enough, in all conscience, who take life in their own hands and seem to mould it to their own liking.' His predilection for those who by their actions strike a blow for free-will suggests that, despite his seeming acceptance of the twentieth-century interpretation of man as a victim of heredity and environment, Maugham chafes under this concept of a pocket-sized hero unfit for the demands of tragedy. It is also noteworthy that those who challenge convention are always men, for only men, in his eyes, are capable of sacrificing themselves for a dream.

On the whole, Maugham has cast his search-light more frequently on women; the more respectable they appear to be, the less comfortably can they face the glare. To this group belong Mrs. Strickland of *The Moon and Sixpence*; Mrs. Garstin of *The Painted Veil*; Mrs. Driffield of *Cakes and Ale*; and most of the wives of colonials encountered in his tales. Irrespective of their social standing or their accomplishments, these women share certain traits: they are cold, grasping, petty, vindictive and hypocritical; they have no attachment to their husbands save as bread-winners; they have no patience with or sympathy for ideals; and, like so many of the author's 'good' women, they combine a sedate manner with a Strindbergian frenzy to dominate, for only by breaking the spirit of the opposite sex can they confirm their superiority.

Another ubiquitous species in Maugham's album is the woman who unintentionally brings grief to her unloved votary. In *Of Human Bondage*, Mildred, by using Philip for her own sordid ends, forever wrecks his peace of mind; in *The Narrow Corner*, Louise, by shattering Erik's image of her, causes him to take his life; in *The Moon and Sixpence*, Blanche, by abandoning her husband, not only destroys their domestic harmony but ultimately precipitates her suicide. These women inflict pain not because they are parched by a thirst for authority but because

they are so blinded by the overpowering urge they feel for other men that all sense of decency or responsibility is obliterated. Regardless of whatever impulse quickens it, woman's power is not a Shavian joke but a cosmic disaster.

Whenever Maugham draws pleasant women, they fall into one of two categories. The first embraces the good-tempered girls of easy virtue who bring comfort and understanding to the men they love, although society does not recognise them. Rosie, the endearing principal of *Cakes and Ale*, with her sloppy dress, her 'live and let live' philosophy, her kindness and her forbearance, is the finest of these creations. Amiable and gentle too are Ata, the Polynesian heroine of *The Moon and Sixpence*, who tends the leprosy-stricken, blind and irascible artist whose life she has chosen to share; the little sempstress of *Christmas Holiday*, who loves Simon selflessly though he finally turns her away; the French model, Suzanne, of *The Razor's Edge*, who joyfully sets up house with Larry until she realises that she counts for nothing in his life and resignedly looks about for a more permanent connexion. In every case, these women are outside the pale: one is a tart, another a native, another a bohemian. And precisely because convention pours its wrath upon them, Maugham offers them the umbrella of his tolerance.

His second classification is composed of women who can be friends as well as lovers. Norah, of *Of Human Bondage*, not only gives Philip a maternal devotion but uncomplainingly surrenders him when Mildred re-appears. Norah's prototype, Susie, of *The Magician*, suffers in silence when the man she adores remains captivated by a less worthy female and even furthers his romantic attachment at the expense of her own tranquillity. Mrs. Frith, of *The Narrow Corner*, proves her unquestioning faith in her husband by sacrificing her well-being to his caprices; although he is only a poseur and a failure, she regards him as a childlike genius who must be protected from the shafts of criticism. All of Maugham's magnanimous women are either mothers or *filles de joie*.

As with Shaw, Maugham's men incline towards greater passivity than the women and are generally at the mercy of the

Life Force. But however battered they may be by emotional upheavals, they seldom lose their consideration for others. Though neglected by the women they revere, they remain dependable and loyal. Philip, for example, forgives Mildred repeatedly for her betrayal, continuing to care for her and for her illegitimate child by another man. Philip, who is the epitome of the unhappy lover and the key to an understanding of Maugham's treatment of passion, immolates himself to such an extent that Mildred comes to expect and even to demand from him everything she desires—whether it be a new wardrobe or a train ticket to the country with a new lover. And as he gives her the money for this excursion, Philip feeds the flame of his misery by imagining Mildred in another man's arms. At the very end, when he has found consolation in marriage to a benevolent young woman, he cannot forget Mildred: he fancies he sees her on the street, and he follows the figure only to discover with relief—and with disappointment—that she is not Mildred, now lost to him forever, but a stranger who resembles the woman to whom he will always be in bondage. At the age of twenty Maugham had observed (in *A Writer's Notebook*):<sup>1</sup> 'The love that lasts longest is the love that is never returned.'

Occasionally Maugham sketches good-looking, thoughtless young men whose sole occupation in life is the pursuit of women. These are the foils to the unsuspecting Philips, these are the false friends who steal away the Mildreds. But selfish and shallow though they are, the havoc they create springs rather from a careless sensuality than from a consuming hunger.

Very rarely does a man dominate a woman. When he does it is because he has a greater purpose in mind, because he has learnt to relegate love to its proper position of unimportance and to 'follow the gleam.' Perhaps the most triumphant of these characters is Charles Strickland of *The Moon and Sixpence*, who deserts his wife and children (the author is careful to excuse this act by making them as disagreeable as possible) to become an artist. Almost as convincing is Simon of *Christmas Holiday*, a ruthless reporter who dreams of establishing a dictatorship in England and who despises women for their enervating effect on men. While Larry of *The Razor's Edge* also forsakes womankind, he is

not as credible, perhaps because he is a pleasant young man and not, like the other two, an unscrupulous ruffian. When scrutinising the tormented and the outcast, whether social or racial, Maugham paints; when surveying the well-balanced and the ordinary, he photographs.

The minor characters who populate his books may range from empire-builders to raffish beachcombers and from social butterflies to quick-witted Cockneys, yet they are all equally well-realised. The most recurrent of Maugham's types, however, is the disillusioned *raisonneur*, often a man (Dr. Saunders of *The Narrow Corner*, Willie Ashenden of *The Moon and Sixpence* and *Cakes and Ale*, Mr. Maugham of *The Razor's Edge*), sometimes a woman (Miss Ley of *Mrs. Craddock* and *The Merry-Go-Round*), who stands outside the main action and comments, not unlike Conrad's Marlow, on the follies of humanity and the insignificance of life.



Maugham published his first novel in 1897, at the age of twenty-three. *Liza of Lambeth* was written while he was still a student at a London hospital. Knowing little of technique then, as he says, he was forced to record only what he observed, preserving the story while stripping it of all embellishment. His own taste was aided by the tendencies of the times: the hot-house prose and the effete atmosphere of an earlier day were gradually being displaced by a sterner, more reportorial style.

Some years before, in 1856, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* had made its appearance. This novel became the Bible of realism, dictating both the form and the content of subsequent fiction. As the movement progressed (or regressed, depending on the point of view) towards an even greater concentration on factual detail and a keener investigation of the lower depths, naturalism emerged. Zola, for example, was found daily, like Shaw's Higgins, wandering through the slums, taking copious notes of the manners and conversation of drunkards, thieves, prostitutes, labourers, uprooted farmers; when these case histories had been sufficiently documented, they would be transferred to the printed

page. Henceforth, there was nothing too sordid to be set down; vice could no longer be condemned, for it was merely a part of the universe.

At first England was not receptive to this trend, but it could not be halted. George Moore, in *A Mummer's Wife* (1885), followed the downward path of a young woman who married an actor and took to drink; George Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889) exhibited the degradation of poverty; Arthur Morrison's *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) studied the bestiality of the slums; while Stephen Crane's *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1892) spearheaded the movement in America. With all these examples before him, Maugham, who confesses that he has never been an innovator, became an acolyte at the shrine of naturalism.

*Liza of Lambeth* is set in the slums of London which the author reproduced with vividness and care. The heroine, Liza Kemp, like Morrison's Lizerunt, is a girl of eighteen who has a reputation for being the grandest dresser and the best dancer in the neighbourhood. She has an unofficial suitor, Tom, but her emotions are not really awakened until she meets the forty-year-old Jim Blakeston who, with his wife and children, has just moved into Vere Street. The remainder of the story deals with Liza's growing passion, her surrender, her feeling of guilt, her longing to elope with Jim, her acceptance of its impossibility and her death by a miscarriage. Her mother, an habitual drunkard—a necessary adjunct to naturalistic *dramatis personæ*—is mournful at the prospect of losing her only child but is cheered by the idea of having a real slap-up funeral 'with plumes.' The book would be memorable if for no other reason than the final scene of Liza's death at dawn, as the lamp splutters out.

Despite its tragic conclusion it is not altogether a sombre novel. It has vitality, exuberance and a passion for life on every page. The account of a humble crowd of people enjoying their holiday conveys a real understanding of the lower classes. The hair-pulling match between Jim's wife and Liza on Vere Street has the same earthy quality as that between Miss Miggs and Dolly in Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge*; the portraits of Liza's mother and her maudlin friend, Mrs. Hodges, suggest Betsey Prig and Sairey Gamp. Above all, the book possesses one arresting quality:



readability. It follows in an unbroken line the fortunes of its heroine; its dialogue springs from character and is always dramatic; it maintains its interest to the very climax; and to the end it rings true. Unlike a great many other novels of its kind, it has fewer characters, a more concentrated focal point, no subplot or cluttered detail, and a structural neatness that indicates the embryo playwright. In fact, Maugham tells us, after reading *Liza*, Sir Henry Arthur Jones predicted that the young author would one day be a successful dramatist.

The greatest virtue of the book is its moderation. It has withstood the test of time fairly well because it is far more occupied with telling a story than with, to paraphrase Dickens' Fat Boy, making the reader's flesh creep. The grim overtones are always selective and do not burden the novel excessively; they are, as is usual with Maugham, backdrops employed to bring greater reality to the characters. Thus it is that *Liza* emerges as a recognisable woman, while Crane's Maggie today sounds like a caricature. Maggie's father is a fool, her mother is a drunkard, her brother is a bully and her seducer a cad. When Maggie chooses the river to a life of continual degradation the reader is only slightly moved, for Maggie has faded too much into her surroundings. In a sense, *Liza* bears the same relation to Maggie that Shylock does to Marlowe's Jew of Malta: one is a living being animated by superior craftsmanship, the other a walking catalogue of horrors.

The same criticism holds for *Liza's* lover, Jim. Whereas Crane's Pete quarrels constantly with everyone and finally leaves Maggie for another woman, Jim has both tenderness and remorse. Like *Liza*, he is heedless of the consequences of their act: they live only for the moment and have no regard for the law of reason. They are both completely instinctual, the first of a series Maugham was to limn of helpless couples in bondage to uncontrollable emotions. Unlike his later creations, these two love each other equally, and while their love ends in death it is nevertheless as strong as life. In this book Maugham finds a glimmer of nobility even in the most sordid circumstances.

Although this type of novel was being cultivated by the more advanced public, the gentle subscribers to Mudie's were horrified

by the subject. In common with other slum novels, *Liza* was either ostentatiously ignored or roundly abused. Despite the clever publicity given it by its publisher, Fisher Unwin, it was not a financial success. When a second edition was published, the young author, bursting with pride, renounced medicine and went to Spain, but when he returned he found that his cheque for the royalties he had earned amounted to twenty pounds. If he had failed to provide himself with an income he had nevertheless created a minor splash in the literary ocean; in fact, Sir Edmund Gosse thought so highly of this book that when he met Maugham many years later, all he could say to the now world-famous author was, 'Oh, my dear Maugham, I liked your *Liza of Lambeth* so much. How wise you are never to have written anything else!'

As Maugham had explored naturalism—then the territory of the intelligentsia—on this single occasion (he once summed up his brief sojourn, '*Et ego in Arcadia vixi*', which he translated as 'I too have been a highbrow'), so was he to chronicle the glittering Smart Set and the romantic Orient when the weather-vane of his audience's predilections shifted. Not a little daunted by the failure of *Liza*, he turned to a new novel.

*The Artistic Temperament of Stephen Carey* never passed beyond the manuscript stage. As it had been rejected he locked it in his drawer and did not refer to it again until 1915, when he transformed it into *Of Human Bondage*. It will be more profitable to consider this unpublished work later in connexion with the final version.

His next book, *The Making of a Saint* (1898), has not been included in the collected edition: it is not a novel of which he is particularly proud. Its failure lies in Maugham's inability to master his subject. Reading somewhere in the writings of Andrew Lang that an author ought to pen historical novels because it is easier to become familiar with past facts than present conditions, Maugham chose Renaissance Italy as his background. After this attempt he did not return to historical fiction until half a century had passed, when he showed himself in control of his material in *Then and Now*. He is one of the few who has always been able to profit by his mistakes.

The situation revolves around a young nobleman, Filippo Brandolini, and Donna Giulia, whom he loves. Like the hero of *Of Human Bondage*, with whom he shares the name, Filippo does not at first concern himself too much with the lady who is to play so important a role in his life. Later, he decides to make her fall in love with him because she seems indifferent to him. (Allowing for the disparity between Giulia, who is a beautiful aristocrat, and Mildred, who is a not very attractive Cockney waitress, the motivation for the love affair is the same). Much against his will, Filippo becomes deeply attached to Giulia: what began as a joke or a trial of strength ends in an overwhelming passion. After she takes him as her lover, Filippo waxes lyrical; he feels transfigured by his emotion and soars to heights of rapture, movingly expressing a young man's concept of his ideal before he has been touched by hard reality. This tone never recurs in Maugham's books: his future heroes do not view romance through enchanted spectacles; even at the beginning of an affair they recognise the unworthiness and the triviality of the objects of their affection. After *The Making of a Saint*, Maugham's theme-song is the haunting *Liebesleid*.

Filippo's happiness is short-lived. His beloved has taken back her former lover, Giorgio dall'Aste, a cousin of her dead husband; when Filippo learns from his friend, Matteo, that Giulia is a strumpet, innocent though she looks, he curses her in the best tradition of nineteenth-century melodrama and departs in search of another mistress. Yet he cannot forget her. During a political crisis in the city he rescues her; then, convinced that she now loves him, marries her. It is not long before she again deceives him. He kills Giorgio and informs Giulia's father of his daughter's dishonour. The old man, with the dignity that suggests a grandee of Spain rather than Italy, stabs Giulia to remove the blot on the family escutcheon. Filippo buries them side by side, envying the love they bore each other, a love he could never share. He wanders about, finally enters the Franciscan order and as Fra Giuliano (even here he cannot forget the woman) commends his sorrows to God. His last thoughts are for Giulia, as Philip's are for Mildred.

It is not the least of the book's ironies that the old friar,

having attained purity and holiness, is beatified after his death, though in life he never found the peace he had sought. He cannot, however, be more than 'beatus', for his descendants fall on evil days and their increasing poverty makes it impossible for them to donate the money required to create a saint. This section of the novel, in many ways more successful than the sombre passages, indicates the author's growing scorn for religion and its hypocrisies and again reveals his proclivities as a satirist. But since romance and irony are poorly blended the book contains a hybrid quality.

Save for Filippo and Giulia the author has not drawn his characters with much reality. They suggest the wooden figures of a Canaletto set against the bustle and colour of the Renaissance. Filippo's friend, Matteo, is of some value since he is the prototype of the *raisonneur*, a figure Maugham will employ with greater skill in succeeding years. Unlike his immediate heirs, however, Matteo manages to remain good-humoured; he is completely free from bitterness.

An additional flaw, typical of historical novels, is the excessively authentic detail which weighs down the book and impedes the story. Besides, the style is suffocated by the atmosphere and the lame attempts at epigram. Yet, inferior though it is to *Liza*, *The Making of a Saint* outlines the pattern of almost all Maugham's later work. Even in dissecting the minor characters he reveals a familiar attitude: when the Duchess' children are captured and threatened with death unless she surrenders the fortress, she does not yield; it is her enemy, finally, who releases her children, for here, as always, the man has more mercy than the woman. Further, in the relationship between the sexes, man and woman will no longer join in a love that defies an antagonistic world; instead, they will pitch their tents in opposite camps and, each alone, will struggle for supremacy until one or the other is destroyed. The victim will generally be the man, for, as Maugham once observed: 'If women exhibit less emotion at pain it does not prove that they bear it better, but rather that they feel it less.' With this novel the high spirits and the *élan* of *Liza* forever disappear.

Although *The Making of a Saint* abandoned naturalism, it

contained elements which ruffled the staid Victorian temperament; shocked critics deplored the indelicate descriptions of the love affairs and some found the title incomprehensible. Maugham concentrated his attention on the theatre for the next few years and not until 1901 did he publish his third novel, *The Hero*.

This book seems a further falling off from his first effort, for the characters are little more than shadows. However, the story underlines a new concern on Maugham's part: it represents the conflict between two people who, while loving each other, are separated by the religious devotion of the woman and the lost faith of the man. The hero, James Parsons, the winner of the Victoria Cross during the Boer War, refuses to pay lip-service to the Church of England ceremonies; when his fiancée, Mary, breaks their engagement, he is shattered enough by conventions foisted upon him to take his own life. Once more Maugham demonstrated his susceptibility to and his awareness of popular demands. For in 1888, Mrs. Humphrey Ward had completed *Robert Elsemere*, the study of a clergyman who becomes sceptical of the miraculous elements of Christianity and who sees the new religion as a vitalising force for social and economic betterment. His wife, Catherine, reared in a more orthodox tradition, is struck with horror by his defection. As he has broken with his past beliefs there is nothing left for Robert to do—save to die. An echo of this struggle was heard in Jones' *Michael and His Lost Angel*, produced in 1896. Here the clergyman is led astray not by German philosophy but by the eternal temptress, Eve.

Shortly after the first World War Maugham took up the theme of *The Hero* and from it fashioned his play *The Unknown* (1920). Again the time was ripe for pondering the problem of faith and the eternal struggle between the spirit and the flesh. And during the second World War the author offered to his public *The Razor's Edge* (1944), an excursion into the California-brand variety of Hindu mysticism. Beginning with *The Hero*, Maugham's absorption in religion has extended over a period of more than forty years and cannot therefore be dismissed as simple opportunism. Again and again he is attracted to the subject; again and again he repulses it with exasperation. He has said, 'It may be that my heart, having found rest nowhere, had

some deep ancestral craving for God and immortality which my reason would have no truck with.' The confirmed doubter generally evolves from the true believer.

Like Maugham's other books, *The Hero* was not too well-received. In the following year he published the last novel of his 'brutal' twenties: *Mrs. Craddock, a return to realism* and a modification of the style employed in *Liza of Lambeth*. Dealing this time with the upper class, the story is not one of unrequited love but of mismatched passion and follows the pattern of *Madame Bovary*.

Bertha Ley, a young, beautiful aristocrat, falls in love with a handsome farmer ('not a gentleman, my dear') living on her estate. After she marries him against the advice of all her friends, the inevitable difficulties arise. Bertha wants to go to Italy for their honeymoon; Edward frowns on foreign lands. Bertha wishes to show her husband the art-galleries and the museums; Edward prefers the music-halls. To some extent Bertha's problem is also Emma Bovary's: both are married to well-meaning clods. But here the similarity ends. Emma is given to excessive sentimentality and self-dramatisation; she dwells in a Cloud-Cuckoo-Land that is removed from the harshness of fact. Her marriage to Charles Bovary is based more on convenience than on passion. She brings financial ruin to him not entirely because she craves luxury but because she enjoys the envy which her material possessions arouse in the hearts of her provincial neighbours. Further, her husband is genuinely fond of her and indulgent of her whims. Bertha Craddock, on the other hand, would gladly renounce her wealth for Edward's love and consideration, neither of which he displays; her unhappiness is caused mainly by his frigid temperament: he cannot give Bertha satisfaction and is embarrassed by her demonstrativeness. When their child is still-born and she learns that she can never have another, her hoard of feeling is doomed to frustration.

For an interval Bertha goes to live in Paris with her aunt, Miss Ley, hoping vainly that her separation from her husband will stir some spark of emotion in him. When she returns she finds that he has become political-minded; moreover, his fondness for clichés is so overpowering ('Every Englishman has a mother') that

he cannot but be successful. He wins a seat in the County Council and is now admired by all who had once looked askance at him.

Bertha again departs with Miss Ley and presently makes the acquaintance of her scapegrace cousin, Gerald Vaudrey, who is soon to leave England. Although Bertha is approaching thirty, she falls in love with the nineteen-year-old boy who has very mature ideas about women. Like the heroine of Schnitzler's *Frau Beate und ihr Sohn*, she dreams of finding fulfilment with Gerald, despite the disparity in age; unlike Beate, however, her moral scruples prevent her from succumbing to Gerald immediately, for Bertha is a British, not a Viennese, creation. By the time she decides to obey her instincts and accompany Gerald to America, he begins to respect her virtue and apologises for his advances. Her discomfiture at his misapprehension ties her tongue; before she can recover herself Gerald has gone forever. Like a sleep-walker, Bertha drifts back to her husband and resumes her mechanical existence; finally Edward is killed in an accident, freeing her—too late. As she sits quietly in her elegant drawing-room she meditates without bitterness on the tragedy of her marriage: she loved her husband more than he loved her and in the end she ceased to love him.

Maugham uses the same relentless, detached technique as Flaubert, the same candid appraisal of everyday events. *Mrs. Craddock* is more adult than Maugham's previous work: its tone is more muted, its irony more veiled. In addition, the author strikes a very modern note in his appreciation of man's interest in the many-sided aspects of life and woman's obsession solely with love. Only Schnitzler has shown as much perception in recognising the chasm between the sexes, a chasm that nothing—even the greatest tact and wisdom—can bridge; only Schnitzler has infused into the situation an equally autumnal loneliness. And like Schnitzler, Maugham has identified himself so completely with his creation that Bertha is no longer a skillful portrait of a female as etched by an observant male (the usual fate of most heroines of masculine fiction) but the essence of the feminine drive.

Ironically, it was this same psychological penetration that repelled most critics, although they found the book 'clever'—an

adjective that was to pursue Maugham unflatteringly throughout his literary career. Bertha's attraction to Edward was considered distressingly vivid, for in 1902 women were not supposed to have passions; if they did, they never displayed them: to do so would be unladylike. Although Maugham had continued to improve in style, to abandon the allusive and self-conscious prose of his previous novels, to concentrate on the virtue of economy, to draw characters rather than types, to utilise a part of the country that he knew well, to add ironic scope to the romantic illusions of mankind forever doomed to disappointment, he had still not achieved his goal of financial independence. But at least he had proved that he was a professional, a man, by his own definition, with the capacity to progress.



Maugham's 'flippant' thirties were characterised by four books of no importance since it was during this period that he became a successful playwright: as a novelist he was merely marking time. *The Merry-Go-Round*, published in 1904, employed the Chekhovian approach. Instead of concentrating on one or two people, Maugham studied a group: he divided the work into four parts, each of which contained a separate story linked together by a single individual, in this instance the reader's old friend, Miss Ley.

The first section, which he later dramatised as his comedy, *Grace*, concerns Grace and Paul Castillyon. Though married to a kindly man who feels great love for her, she is, like Bertha Craddock, a bored and unhappy wife. She cares nothing for her husband's land-owning interests; she is indifferent to his tenants, depressed by the country. Like Kitty Fane of *The Painted Veil* she takes a lover; unlike Kitty, however, she suffers from pangs of conscience, for she is a heroine of 1904. When the game-keeper's daughter is turned away for bearing an illegitimate child, Grace begins to question her own conduct; because no one knows of her lapse, she can escape condemnation. Gradually she repents. Now aware of her husband's sterling qualities, thoroughly regretting her past, Grace resolves to give him the affection he so richly



merits. While anxious to confess her sins she remains silent, not for her own sake but for her husband's peace of mind. With this ending Maugham departed from the still-accepted usage of meting out punishment to moral transgressors; he was beginning to recognise the relativity of 'right' and 'wrong'.

The second part tells the tale of Basil Kent and Jenny Bush, the leading characters of his early tragedy, *A Man of Honour*. It is noteworthy that whenever Maugham felt he had not made the most of his material he tried to rework it, sometimes by transposing a novel into a play or a play into a novel, sometimes by rewriting it from a different point of view. If the results were not always satisfactory at least these efforts made him a more flexible craftsman. By grasping the principles of both media early in his career without identifying himself too closely with either, he was able to shift from one to the other with ease.

The third part of the book follows the fortunes of a spoiled young-man-about-town who is whipped into shape by a common, though uncommonly clever, little actress he marries. This section is the most readable of all, for Maugham made the most of his opportunity for social satire. The last part describes the short life of a young poet who weds a much older woman. Though he and his wife attain a happiness not granted to many, he dies of tuberculosis; she, in turn, aware of his condition before their marriage, seems all the more drawn to him, as are so many of the women in Schnitzler's books who love men in the shadow of death. Even when ideal passion is finally realised, both writers affirm, it cannot linger: there is no earthly paradise.

The critical reception of *The Merry-Go-Round* ran true to type. It was again conceded to be 'clever'; there was praise for the characterisation. But readers were as shocked by the Basil-Jenny episode (the marriage of a gentleman and a barmaid) as the theatre-going public had been; long before D. H. Lawrence was to chronicle the attraction of a game-keeper for an aristocrat, Maugham was tilting at the windmill of social convention.

Two years later, in 1906, he published *The Bishop's Apron*, a novelisation of his play, *Loaves and Fishes*. Though this satire on clergymen was received as the smartest and most genuinely humorous novel of the season, Maugham had undertaken it

because of financial pressures and so set no value on it. In 1908 he novelised another play, *The Explorer*, for the same reason; the setting of this book gives it some degree of interest.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Britain had grown from an important power to a mighty empire, propelled towards her manifest destiny by such visionaries as Robert Clive, Cecil Rhodes and Benjamin Disraeli. With the annexation of far-flung lands came the problems of administration, reflected first in the political, then in the cultural, life of the time. Soon Britain's territorial possessions began to supply the background and the subject matter for contemporary fiction. Conrad, for example, made frequent use of the tropics, though his aim, whenever he examined individuals vitiated by an exotic atmosphere, was to seek a meaning in and wrest a moral from their tragic self-betrayal. In contrast, Kipling, exploiting colonial regions partly to spin tales of adventure, piped his tune of the 'white man's burden' and defended the spirit of conquest as a natural phenomenon in a world of racial strife. *The Explorer* is also flavoured with this saccharine jingoism, for its hero, Alec McKenzie, unquestioningly follows the flag.

Since orthodoxy has never been Maugham's *métier*, the tone of the book appears forced and unconvincing. Nor do the characters support the theme effectively, although they are less superficial than their stage counterparts: Maugham's assertion that he has always taken novel-writing more seriously than play-making is borne out by a comparison of the leading figures of both versions. In addition, the technique is clumsy, for Maugham had a new problem in shifting the scene from England to Africa and back again. (The same demand confronted him eleven years later in *The Moon and Sixpence*, but by then he was master of the situation). Yet *The Explorer* was enthusiastically received: some reviewers, in a burst of patriotic fervour, called Alec the finest type of man Britain had ever produced and expressed heart-felt relief that Maugham had at last abandoned his stories of the slums. (Their assumption that he had published several instead of only one indicates that *Liza of Lambeth* must have left a deeper impression on the critics than they were willing to admit). So it was that *The Explorer*, vastly inferior to *Liza* or

*Mrs. Craddock*, least able to bear the passage of the years, won most praise for the author.

His next novel, *The Magician*, published in the same year, was also insignificant. Possibly interested in the writings of Arthur Machen, whom he has always admired, Maugham contrived a story of the supernatural which owes its recent republication to the growing audience demand for science-fiction. The leading character is Oliver Haddo, a distorted and caricatured version of Aleister Crowley (the posture-striking poet and self-styled alchemist whose acquaintance Maugham had made in Paris) When Dr. Arthur Burdon chances to utter some slighting remark about Haddo, in revenge the latter bewitches the doctor's fiancée, Margaret Dauncey, and steals her away. His evil spell not only corrupts her nature but wafts her soul into the bodies of minuscule monsters Haddo has fashioned in his laboratory. By using Margaret's spirit, Haddo becomes a creator of life. Following much mumbo-jumbo about the practices of Paracelsus and Eliphas Lévi, the story details the destruction of Haddo and his workshop by Arthur and the release of Margaret by death. After an acquaintance with *Liza* and *Mrs. Craddock*, the reader is unpleasantly surprised by the *fin de siècle* flavour of *The Magician*.

Aside from Maugham's now-familiar refrain of unrequited love as personified by Margaret's friend, Susie, another theme emerges—a new one for the author. This is the passion for power which Maugham was to re-examine, after an interval of forty years, in *Christmas Holiday*. Simon, one of the principals of the later novel, seeks dominion over men; to obtain it he suffers the utmost privation and teaches himself independence of material things. Oliver Haddo, whose outward appearance may be that of a brutal Bacchus rather than an attenuated Trappist, knows Simon's lust: he too wishes to be worshipped as a god, but his agency is magic, whereas Simon's is autocracy. Despite the disparity between the novels, their background, their story, their characters, both Haddo and Simon represent a force which has thrust itself upon the twentieth century with a violence unknown to the more placid Victorians. Haddo is almost a projection of the future.

Once again the critics were revolted by the realistic treatment

of the tale. With relief Maugham relinquished novel-writing, determined to spend the rest of his life composing plays. When beholding a sunset as he walked along the street, he thanked God he would never have to describe one again. Or so he thought.

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Before long, Maugham's growing success as a dramatist began to make him restive. (He has said that he can never be on one side of a street without becoming curious about the other; this attitude may explain not only his incessant desire for travel but also his awareness of the dangers of stagnation). In 1913, notwithstanding his earlier resolution to abandon the novel, he retired temporarily from the stage to devote himself to another book. There were several reasons for his decision. There were greater advantages in the written than in the spoken word: because a novel could shift casually from scene to scene without being limited by the physical demands of the stage, because it allowed opportunities for looser construction and greater ramification of ideas, because it could more easily explore a character's inner self (the Shakespearean soliloquy had become anathema to the modern realistic theatre, which was therefore reduced in scope), because it was not dependent on another party (the novelist could be actor, director and designer in one), Maugham believed this particular medium best fitted for what he at the moment wished to say. Strongest of all factors was the subject matter—the memories of his past life which haunted him so remorselessly that only by setting them down could he be free. For two years he laboured over the work and in 1915 published the result: *Of Human Bondage*.

Like other autobiographical novels dealing with the adolescent in search of his soul (Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are the best known of the British group), *Of Human Bondage* follows an already established pattern. Its hero, Philip Carey, runs the gamut of the same youthful emotions: he too seeks to please his elders by outward obedience; then, as he reaches maturity, he questions accepted principles, insists upon

his liberty and finds it through aloofness; he feeds on books and dreams alike, moves from religious fervour to pessimism, contemplates suicide, rebels finally against everything which has been instilled in him, and learns resignation. He accepts his loneliness and his difference from other men, for these very qualities have helped to broaden his understanding.

The reader is introduced to Philip at the age of nine; the year is 1885. The first scene takes place in mid-winter at the bedside of a dying woman, Philip's recently-widowed mother. Weakened by delivery of a still-born child, she weeps over Philip not only because he will be an orphan but because he must face the world with the deformity of a club-foot. When Philip goes to live with his uncle, the Reverend William Carey, he begins to recognise his loss, for the uncle is selfish and stupid: though the latter criticises people with greedy appetites, he sees no dichotomy in giving the top of his egg to Philip for breakfast. (This episode comes directly from Maugham's own experience; even today when he speaks of it he does not conceal his resentment). In every way the Reverend Mr. Carey suggests the hypocritical and egocentric Theobald Pontifex of Butler's novel.

Philip, as shy and introspective by temperament as his creator, reads avidly until a formal education becomes necessary. He is sent to Tercanbury, the Canterbury of Maugham's life, where he makes the acquaintance of boys his own age. They taunt the new arrival as Joyce's Stephen Dedalus is taunted; they mock his family, his beliefs, his inexperience. But Stephen at last finds friends; Lawrence's Paul Morel has his mother; Butler's Ernest Pontifex, his aunt; Philip's only company is the mocking laughter his club-foot engenders. His school-mates imitate his grotesque walk; they trip him and howl with glee as he lies on the ground, the dust mingling with his tears. Later, as he lies in bed, for the first time conscious of his deformity, he begins to think that his life is only a dream, that presently he must awaken to find himself at home with his mother.

As his feeling of apartness grows he begins to see the world more clearly than most and looks down on those who accept life at face value; his timidity becomes tinged with arrogance, for in the author's eyes shyness is 'a mixture of diffidence and conceit.'

While he tries instinctively to adapt himself to people, he is never at ease among them nor can he share their raucous laughter; if he seems to merge with the group it is only because he is acting out a part. Before long he is swept by a feeling of religiosity; however, his hunger for God is based mainly on his wish to be cured of his handicap. He sets a time-limit to the miracle he hopes for and when it fails to occur he believes that he has been cheated: this is the beginning of Philip's (and the author's) agnosticism.

Finally, Philip is sent to King's School in Tercanbury where he fares no better; he is bullied by incompetent schoolmasters, most of them clergymen, who either ignore him entirely or make him the butt of sarcastic jokes. The English schools of sixty years ago were not noted for gentleness of discipline; the schoolmasters portrayed here, though more educated and better-bred, in their psychological approach to teaching are lineally descended from Wackford Squeers. His unhappy experiences leave a lasting scar on Philip as well as on his creator; indeed Maugham's very tastes seem to have been shaped by these circumstances. Many years later, when he came to compile an anthology of the world's best short stories, *Tellers of Tales*, it was inevitable that one of them, L. A. G. Strong's 'The Imposition', should be concerned with the miseries of a mistreated schoolboy at whose death the teacher feels regret, not because he has used his pupil harshly but because the child is now beyond his master's punishment.

Gradually Philip learns to protect himself from the gibes of his companions by employing his own sarcastic wit, though he cannot forget the humiliations he had previously suffered. Instinctively he shrinks from people, suggesting Maugham's own description of himself: 'I have never liked anyone at first sight . . . I am not a social person . . . I can never forget myself. The hysteria of the world repels me and I never feel more aloof than when I am in the midst of a throng surrendered to a violent feeling of mirth or sorrow.'

Philip sets off for Heidelberg to complete his education. He meets there schoolmasters, hitherto identified in his mind with dullness and prudence, who have fought with Garibaldi;

aesthetes who burn with a hard, gem-like flame, but who are careful to do so on a comfortable annuity; dissenters, once regarded by him as ill-bred candidates for damnation, who are actually gentlemen. He begins to depend on his own intelligence and his own judgment. And he rejoices in his seeming freedom.

When he returns to Blackstable he has his first love affair with a middle-aged governess, the experience causing him to wonder why expectation is never fulfilled by reality; he goes up to London to be an accountant but is bored and unhappy; he sets off for Paris where he encounters still another life, 'la vie de Bohème', and where he searches for his place in the scheme of things. His periodic home-comings are marred by quarrels with his uncle who considers Philip a wastrel and a drifter and who, in his fury, refers to Philip's club-foot. The boy is not surprised at his uncle's mode of attack: few can resist the temptation to mention his deformity when they lose their temper. But Philip has trained himself

. . . not to show any sign that the reminder wounded him . . . They called him cynical and callous. He had acquired calmness of demeanour and under most circumstances an unruffled exterior, so that now he could not show his feelings. People told him he was unemotional; but he knew that he was at the mercy of his emotions: an accidental kindness touched him so much that sometimes he did not venture to speak in order not to betray the unsteadiness of his voice . . . But notwithstanding he was able to look at himself from the outside and smile with amusement. 'By Jove, if I weren't flippant, I should hang myself,' he thought cheerfully.

This full-length portrait of the tormented Philip is paralleled by an entry in Maugham's journal, *A Writer's Notebook*: 'He had so little love when he was small that later it embarrassed him to be loved. It made him feel shy and awkward . . . He did not know what to say when someone paid him a compliment, and a manifestation of affection made him feel a fool.' It is significant that in later years Maugham no longer looked upon a happy home and a loving family as assets: since he had been without both all his life, like Shaw he grew increasingly sceptical of their existence.

After Philip returns to London to become a physician he

makes the acquaintance of a waitress whom one of his fellow-students admires. Philip pursues her without knowing why. There is nothing about her to attract him; her coldness irritates him (much as Giulia's indifference annoyed Filippo in *The Making of a Saint*); she is in every way the opposite of his ideal. Even her name is ugly. Mildred. (Maugham has said that he fixed on the most unpleasant name he could find in the English language to give his 'heroine'). Philip's passion for her becomes all the more unbearable because he cannot understand how he can love someone he despises. When she tells him she is going to be married, he is finally driven to seek companionship elsewhere.

He finds it in the person of Norah Nesbit, one of Maugham's 'mother-women'. With her Philip forgets his shyness, for she can speak to him of his deformity without wounding him; with her he finds peace and contentment, for she lavishes her tenderness on him; with her he regains his former interest in life and art, for she restores his balance and whets his intellectual appetite. Though he is happy with her he does not love her, and so when Mildred re-appears on the scene he leaves Norah. He provides shelter for Mildred and her illegitimate child (the product of the liaison she had termed a 'marriage'); in repayment for this kindness Mildred goes off with his friend Griffiths, who soon tires of the affair. Endowed with a Dostoevski-like capacity for suffering, Philip still yearns for Mildred to come back to him regardless of the anguish she has caused; instead, she slips into his rooms, takes her belongings and his money and vanishes again. Philip drearily contemplates the desert of his future without her, even as Maugham had observed in his journal for 1900 (*A Writer's Notebook*): 'They say that life is short; to those who look back it may seem short enough; but to those who look forward, it is horribly long, endless. Sometimes one feels that one cannot endure it. Why cannot one fall asleep and never, never again wake? . . . The thought of living forever is horrible.'

Philip resumes his medical studies. He observes the people who come to the clinic for help: old and young, sick and hypochondriacal, comic (like the middle-aged bawd who is never too ancient to issue an invitation) and tragic (like the eighteen-year-old girl who is soon to die of phthisis), hopeful and desolate. And



something happens to him in the process. For the first time he learns to forget himself in serving others; his real nature expresses itself without a protective covering. If Philip accomplishes his best work when he regards his patients with feeling, Maugham creates his finest book when he treats his subjects with compassion.

In the clinic Philip meets a little boy who suffers from the same deformity which had twisted his own life. The child is quite unconcerned about the condition, to Philip's astonishment and bewilderment. He begins to realise how different people react to similar circumstances, even as Maugham notes this disparity in his memories of Arnold Bennett (*Traveller's Library*):

Everyone knew that Arnold was afflicted with a very bad stammer; it was painful to watch the struggle he had sometimes to get the words out. It was torture to him. Few realised the exhaustion it caused him to speak. What to most men was as easy as breathing to him was a constant strain. It tore his nerves to pieces. Few knew the humiliations it exposed him to, the ridicule it excited in many, the impatience it aroused, the awkwardness of feeling that it made people find him tiresome; and the minor exasperation of thinking of a good, amusing or apt remark and not venturing to say it in case the stammer ruined it. Few knew the distressing sense it gave rise to of a bar to complete contact with other men . . . I think it is not the least proof of his strong and sane character that notwithstanding this impediment he was able to retain his splendid balance and regard the normal life of man from a normal point of view.

If a handicap can change one man's nature and leave another's unaltered, it begins to look as though an individual cannot be blamed for his character which comes to him by the accident of birth. So Maugham reasons, as an avowed determinist.

One of the patients in the hospital, a man of charm and culture, attracts Philip's notice. Thorpe Athelny introduces Philip to his large and happy family, to the great Spanish writers and painters, to the wonder and richness of life. Athelny is satisfied because he is faithful to his nature and not to the strictures of convention; he is as contemptuous of 'correct' attitudes as Charles Strickland (*The Moon and Sixpence*) or Larry (*The*



Somerset Maugham in his bedroom at the Villa Mauresque,  
at the age of 78.

*By courtesy of Edward Quinn.*



*Razor's Edge*), and like them has avoided the bondage which the average man endures.

For the last time Mildred returns. Wearily Philip opens the door to her and accepts her and her child. He believes he no longer loves her, yet he is still bound by the remembrance of his past emotion and the agony he has known. Maugham records in his journal for 1900 (*A Writer's Notebook*): 'My heart was sad for her sake, and though I had ceased to love her, I found no consolation. A painful sense of emptiness had replaced the bitter anguish of before; and it was perhaps even harder to bear. Love may come and memory yet remain, memory may go and relief even then may not come.'

Philip's indifference piques Mildred, who attempts to make love to him. When, however, he thinks of the men who have possessed her, his former longing for her is transformed into a revulsion he cannot conceal. Mildred, thoroughly enraged by this rejection, hurls at him the only word which can wound: 'Cripple'. One evening, when he comes home he discovers that in his absence, like the vixen of Kipling's *The Light That Failed*, she has slashed all his pictures and destroyed his furnishings as a parting gesture. He tries to bring some order to his life and to thrust her from his consciousness. Shortly after, he loses his small patrimony on the Stock Exchange and, now penniless, is forced to become a draper in a department store; he is only released from economic servitude by his uncle's death which provides him with enough income to complete his medical studies. Realising it is purely by chance that some fail and some succeed, he begins to understand the riddle of the Persian carpet which a Paris acquaintance, Cronshaw, has given him: 'Life was insignificant and death without consequence . . . Whatever happened to him now would be one more motive to add to the complexity of the pattern . . . It would be a work of art, and it would be none the less beautiful because he alone knew of its existence, and with his death it would at once cease to be.'

Philip's apprenticeship, echoing the puzzled bewilderment of present-day youth in its quest for security, draws to a close. Mildred disappears forever, ridden by the disease of a dissipated life. Philip obtains his first appointment as a doctor and marries

Athelny's daughter Sally (a projection of the marriage Maugham says he would like to have made), who loves him though he only admires her. He never quite succeeds in erasing Mildred from his memory, for 'only death could finally assuage his desire.'

In probing Philip's inability to exorcise the spectre of this intrinsically worthless woman, Maugham appears merely to be dramatising an ancient adage (that passion has no relation to reason) and its corollary (that feelings of attraction and repulsion can exist side by side in the same individual). Actually, Maugham is concerned with a much more subtle issue—the depths of his hero's self-hatred engendered by a club-foot which sets him apart from the normal man, which torments him unduly because of his inherently sensitive nature, and which has never been counter-balanced by the refuge of a loving home; what better way is there for Philip to punish himself for his deformity than to yield to a ruinous obsession, in short, to the unconscious death-wish? Maugham makes Philip's bondage to Mildred a kind of symbolic suicide and in so doing reveals as clear an understanding of character motivation in terms of modern psychology as, say, D. H. Lawrence displayed in his explorations of the Oedipus complex. However, as Maugham's style of writing is unadorned rather than intricate, traditional rather than iconoclastic, as he seems at first glance more intent on telling a story than on propounding a thesis, as his ideas are always implicitly hinted rather than explicitly analysed, the profundity of his observations is sometimes missed or even dismissed. One is led to the melancholy conclusion that the melodies of a flute-player are seldom as highly regarded as the blasts of a trumpeter.

Immediately after the second World War, Maugham presented to the Library of Congress in Washington the manuscript of *Of Human Bondage* (its title, taken from Spinoza's *Ethics*, had originally been *Beauty for Ashes*, before Maugham discovered that another author had used the same quote from Isaiah). A few years later he deposited the first draft of his novel, written almost twenty years previously, which he had called *The Artistic Temperament of Stephen Carey*. By comparing both versions, one may learn much not only of his growth in personality but of his development as a craftsman.

When the story begins, Stephen Carey is nine years old, the same age as Philip. Though his mother, Sophie, is near death, like Philip's mother, Helen, she does not arrange to have her photograph taken so that her son may always remember her; one of the most poignant episodes of *Of Human Bondage* is omitted. After he becomes an orphan, Stephen goes to live with his uncle and aunt and their little daughter, May. His uncle John, a business man (in contrast to Philip's uncle, a clergyman), is an agreeable person who makes Stephen's life happy; May is a delightful playmate who gives Stephen a companionship that the solitary Philip never knows. Stephen is finally sent to school where he suffers bitterly, but the author never explains why, for Stephen is a normal little boy who possesses no handicap. Because there is no motivation for Stephen's misery, he is not a convincing character.

Like Philip, Stephen is also tormented by his fellow-students, but Stephen at last turns on his enemies, strikes the biggest of the ring-leaders and is henceforward regarded with respect. This is a projection of the author's desire: Philip also dreams of vengeance but never succeeds in taking it. Later, Stephen goes to a university at Rouen (as opposed to Philip's at Heidelberg) where he tries to live aesthetically: he reads French poetry in the spring, lying on the grass. When he catches a cold he asks himself why all his romantic gestures have such ludicrous results; only when he is later redrawn as Philip does his naïve wonder change to ironic acceptance.

His first love affair, paralleling Philip's, is with a governess, though there is less examination of Stephen's disillusionment with the mystery of sex. He goes to London to study law (rather than medicine, which is Philip's choice), and soon meets Rose Cameron who, save for her colouring—brown eyes and dark hair—has the thin lips and the anæmia of Mildred, and is also a waitress in a tea-shop. He falls in love with her and suffers pangs of jealousy when she chooses someone else. Finally, he cajoles her into accompanying him to Windsor for the week-end; but as he cannot afford to marry her she leaves Stephen for a common little Cockney, Todd. Stephen is as unable to forget her as Philip is unable to forget Mildred. Later, Rosie tells him that Todd has

a family and cannot marry her although she is going to have a baby. He promises to care for her (another echo of Philip), while Rosie, foreshadowing Mildred, calls upon him whenever she needs help in extricating herself from difficulties. Stephen, realising that he can no longer trust her, tries to commit suicide, a temptation that assails Philip more than once. Of Stephen, the young Maugham remarks: 'Only those who suffer as he had, can forgive his weakness.'

Stephen, falling seriously ill with influenza, is nursed by his landlady, later immortalised as Mrs. Hudson of *Cakes and Ale*; the same situation is handled much more deftly when Maugham employs Griffiths to restore Philip's health, for in this way the first meeting between Mildred and Griffiths is arranged. Stephen at last decides that he wants peace rather than love and, breaking with Rosie, proposes to his cousin May, who has always adored him. After the preparations for the marriage have been made, Stephen returns to London to see Rosie, now enjoying the patronage of a banker. He falls a victim to his unfortunate passion again, and they spend the night together. Philip, on the other hand, is never Mildred's lover.

In the morning, Stephen is revolted by what he has done. To profess affection for so pure a woman as May and then, the day before the wedding, to succumb to Rosie, makes him feel unclean. Maugham describes this emotional reaction once more in *The Painted Veil*, when Kitty, recently widowed and guilt-ridden, surrenders herself for a night to a man whose mistress she has been and whom she has come to despise. She too is struck with horror when the episode is over, but unlike Stephen she accepts the fact that the noble and the ignoble have their dwelling-place in the same human being, a thesis Schnitzler amplified in *Das weite Land*, when he compared the soul to a vast domain of contradictory impulses.

Finally, Stephen recovers from his remorse and returns to May. He marries her and determines to go into parliament where he is confident of being a success. Maugham's closing remark advises the reader not to expect consistency in human behaviour, one of his favourite themes of later years.

*Stephen Carey* is by no means a provocative novel. Small

wonder that it was rejected. The settings are blurred; the tale is commonplace; the action is often unmotivated; the style is infelicitous. Worst of all, the characters are two-dimensional: Uncle John and Aunt Nellie are genial nonentities; May is perhaps a little like the girl Philip marries in *Of Human Bondage*, but she lacks vitality. One of Stephen's friends, Ernest Greene, who has taste and intelligence and who detests Rosie's vulgarity, is the *Doppelgänger* of Philip: Ernest's traits and attitudes are fused with Philip in the later version, thereby giving Maugham's hero depth and stature.

Rosie is a trifle more complex. She duplicates Mildred's frigidity, commonness and stupidity, yet in many ways she is not bad-hearted. Certainly she is incapable of Mildred's cruelty and venom. Her incompleteness indicates that Maugham was too close to his subject at the time and was no more able to do Rosie justice than he was able to discuss the reason for Stephen's shyness; the two central pieces of *Of Human Bondage* are missing. But of course the book's most obvious deficiency is its immaturity.

Maugham, though unfamiliar with the activities of a French university town, sent Stephen there, in the natural ignorance of youth; consequently, the authentic details of student life forming Philip's adventures at Heidelberg (which Maugham himself attended) are absent. While he was unacquainted with the legal profession and therefore unable to describe it authoritatively, Maugham selected it for Stephen; wisely, he later altered Philip's vocation to medicine, drawing upon his own training as a doctor to provide a realistic atmosphere. Since Maugham had left France when he was a child and did not take up residence in Paris until he was thirty, he had no contact with the artists of the Latin Quarter and could not observe their mode of existence through Stephen's eyes; Philip, however, as the product of a writer of riper experience, passes his time with painters whose personalities, whether tragic (like the English Fanny Price, driven to suicide by poverty and inaptitude) or comic (like the American Flanagan, ear-marked for success by joining 'popper's' business), enrich the story. Most important of all, at twenty-four Maugham had not clarified his religious beliefs, and so *Stephen Carey*, unlike *Of Human Bondage*, contains no attacks on orthodoxy.



Further, as the young author was still searching for some satisfactory interpretation of the universe, Stephen merely voices his pale skepticism once or twice; it remains for Philip to discover that life has no more meaning than can be traced in the pattern of a Persian rug, and with this newly-acquired and hard-won wisdom to fashion his life accordingly.

Both manuscripts are illuminating in another way. *Stephen Carey* contains innumerable blots, smears, corrections, emendations, insertions, excisions, whereas *Of Human Bondage* is notable for its scarcity of any large-scale changes. In *Stephen Carey*, the dialogue is sparse and flat, for Maugham had not yet become an accomplished dramatist; in *Of Human Bondage*, the spoken passages seem ready to leap upon the stage. The narrative portions of *Stephen Carey* tend to be verbose; similar sections of *Of Human Bondage* show a keen appreciation for economy: excessive adverbs are cut, too-often repeated phrases are recast to avoid monotony, sentences are inverted to provide a better rhythm; a vivid picture of a head-nurse is deleted because she is not relevant to the story; excessive diatribes against the Reverend William Carey are eliminated, making him more credible; a lengthy description of Philip's tormentors, who call him 'club', is abbreviated; a tendency to enlarge too much on discussions of art is curbed. It remains something of a miracle, the miracle of creation, that through unflagging patience and effort the indifferent accomplishment known as *Stephen Carey* should have blossomed into *Of Human Bondage*.

When *Of Human Bondage* first appeared in a world at war, the reception accorded it was cool. One critic condemned it as being a record of sordid realism; another, bemoaning its diffuseness, admitted that it was clever but added that it left a feeling akin to nausea; still another found its ethics pagan; while a fourth, censuring the conflict between Philip and his uncle, wished the author a more sturdy subject for his next serious novel. Theodore Dreiser was among the few who praised the book, though his ecstatic 'It sings, it has rapture, it has colour' did not greatly impress the public. The continued admiration of such men as Heywood Brown and Carl Van Doren finally created enough attention to develop a market. Gradually, *Of Human*

*Bondage* became a commercial as well as an artistic success; at this writing, plans are afoot to convert it into a musical comedy, the most recent Valhalla for classics.

*Of Human Bondage* is Maugham's most ambitious work. It is a study of one man's search for truth in a world compounded of hostility, cruelty and deceit. More fortunate than Meredith's Richard Feverel, who is annihilated by his father's excessively one-sided discipline, or than Lawrence's Paul Morel, who is submerged in his mother's love, Philip rises from the battlefield shaken but unbroken. Like Butler's Ernest Pontifex, he can say, 'I will live as I like living, not as other people would like me to live.' Unlike Ernest, Philip willingly accepts the routine of a humdrum life, the responsibilities of a home, a family and a profession: he comes to prefer the harbour, not the wide expanse of ocean. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, on the other hand, rejects Philip's choice, embracing exile as the instrument of self-fulfillment. Maugham leaves Philip and his fiancée holding hands in the middle of Trafalgar Square, while cabs and omnibuses hurry to and fro and crowds mill in every direction; Joyce leaves Stephen making preparations to go forth and 'forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.' Yet Maugham, while insisting on the importance of contact with the world, has shut himself off from it; Joyce, holding more aloof from that world, still remained part of it. Physically participating, Maugham is an emotional alien; physically withdrawing, Joyce is a spiritual component. Maugham's final attitude is negative, Joyce's positive.

The marked disparity between *Of Human Bondage* and Maugham's later books has caused some critics to isolate the novel as a freakish production the author was incapable of repeating, an artistic accident. Others believe, on the basis of his masterpiece, that he deliberately cheapened his talents for the money he could make, asserting, in Mary Colum's words, that he 'lost the two qualities which determine greatness: his fire and his wings.' It would be a mistake to believe that Maugham's desire for commercial success was responsible for this diminution, although the depreciating effect of a desire for popularity cannot

be discounted. (He has, for example, expressed perfect willingness to allow an abridgement of *Of Human Bondage*, declaring that no novel is sacrosanct; that an author must observe changes in audience taste; that his natural desire is to be enjoyed by as wide a circle of readers as possible. All this may be permissible, but when the shorter version completely eliminates Cronshaw and the episode of the Persian carpet, it robs the book of both point and purpose). The causes lie much deeper.

If *Of Human Bondage* stands apart from the rest of Maugham's work it is because for once he was not afraid to relive in the person of Philip the sorrow common to all men. For once he became part of his creation instead of coolly observing it like some casual visitor from a distant planet. And for once, because Philip was so close to him, he showed tenderness in his study of the human heart; how close may be understood by his admission when he made a recording of the book for the Institute of the Blind. On this occasion, when he read it for the first time in thirty years he found himself unable to continue beyond the opening paragraph: 'I choked up and then, to my utter humiliation, I broke down and cried.' Although he does have an undeniable gift for ironic witticisms, his real speciality has always been the problem of pain.

As the years brought their toll of disillusion and unhappiness, Maugham sought self-protection in a greater aloofness; though his books developed in technical skill they drifted further from humanity. But it may be that even his *magnum opus* carried within it the seeds of destruction. At the manuscript's conclusion he added this observation, deleted from the published version: 'And here I leave Philip Carey. To accept happiness is to resign oneself to defeat.' If an author's point of embarkation is the uselessness of life, the insignificance of individuals, the unimportance of right and wrong, it is not altogether surprising that his destination should be a spiritual *cul-de-sac*. *Of Human Bondage* is not the beginning but the end of Maugham's credo; having said what he had to say as simply, as completely, as perfectly as possible, there remained to him either the road of deepening committal or the ditch of eventual retreat. One cannot arraign Maugham for choosing the second course without also trying the epoch he

represents: the waning portion of the realistic-naturalistic movement which, once born of the passion for reform, has now dwindled into the inertia of despair.

As the pendulum of the world's values swings back and forth, so may the book lose some of its immediate strength. But accurately reflecting the twentieth-century temper which affirms the slavery—whether emotional, religious, social, political or economic—of mankind yet which struggles for survival without the comfort of a faith, *Of Human Bondage* remains a sure passport to its author's immortality. As Maugham himself likes to explain it, 'My novel has now the doubtful honour of being required reading in many educational institutions.'

In this decade, since Maugham was devoting most of his time to comedies for the theatre and to short stories, he wrote only one other novel, *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919), which rounded off his 'cynical' forties. In *Of Human Bondage* he had made a slight allusion to a painter who surrendered everything to follow art; and in the unpublished manuscript he had added: 'Perhaps in the future I may, with other characters more fortunately gifted by nature, take up again and continue the ideas suggested in this book.' So it was that he completed this fictional biography of one of France's most striking personalities, Paul Gauguin. *The Moon and Sixpence* has for its central theme the struggle of the artist to find himself. Significantly, the French version is entitled *L'Envôûte*; the German, *Der Besessene*—the story of a man possessed.

With this book Maugham again demonstrated his barometric talent for registering public taste: as David Paul has pointed out, by the early 1920s the artist-outcast had become a popular myth; eccentricity was the inevitable expression of genius. Though an artist's efforts to preserve his individuality often brought suffering to others, at least his gifts outweighed his cruelties, as Shaw was quick to note two decades before. Moreover, if the artist-outcast was a fashionable idea, so was the trend, previously mentioned, towards the glamour of the far-away. By removing his hero from the Philistine world of industrialism and placing him in the primitive world of the South Seas, Maugham evolved a doubly effective novel.

The book begins with a digression on the literary life and the hazards of art. Told in the first person, it purports to be a collection of facts concerning the well-known British painter, Charles Strickland. It treats of the three main phases of his life, shifting the scene from London to Paris to Tahiti; and the action itself is pieced together by the narrator who learns the story of Strickland from the various people who had known him. Much later, the narrator (let us call him Ashenden for convenience) adds his own observations to what he has already heard.

When Ashenden first meets Mrs. Strickland, who is fond of cultivating the arts, he is struck by her sweetness and good humour. He is introduced to her by Rose Waterford, a successful and feline novelist to be encountered again in *Cakes and Ale*. He grows more and more curious to know Charles Strickland, a stockbroker who does not share his wife's aesthetic interests, but the man is a disappointment: he is taciturn, dull, undistinguished, ordinary. He is also the natural subject for Maugham's theme of unpredictability.

Strickland, of course, far from leading a conventional existence, is secretly studying to be a painter. When he feels that nothing more is to be achieved by remaining in England, he deserts his family without compunction. For the sake of appearances, Mrs. Strickland pretends he has eloped with a ballet dancer: the pursuit of a woman is so much more easily explained than the pursuit of an ideal. And as she has always passed for a patron of the arts, how can she possibly account for her husband's reluctance to confide his dream to her? Five years later, when Ashenden visits Paris and calls on his old friend, Dirk Stroeve, a second-rate though financially successful painter, he learns with astonishment that Stroeve is convinced Strickland is a genius. Strickland is still unashamed of his past conduct and indifferent to public adulation or disapproval; because he does not live by accepted mores he possesses 'a freedom which was an outrage.' Like Shaw's Louis Dubedat, Strickland observes his own code of honour: both are unscrupulous in money matters, moral attitudes, human relationships. But Louis, being a Shavian hero, has charm; he lacks Strickland's essential malice.

When Strickland falls dangerously ill Stroeve cares for him

until he recovers. Strickland shows his gratitude by robbing Stroeve of his wife, Blanche, and then leaving her. Blanche, unable at first to believe that her love for Strickland cannot re-awaken a corresponding ardour in him, recognises at last that she has lost her struggle to hold him; now hating both him and herself, she commits suicide. Stroeve, shattered by grief returns to his native Holland to find peace. Strickland sails for an island in the Pacific and vanishes from the civilised world. After his death Ashenden goes to Tahiti to discover how Strickland spent his last years: from Captain Nichols, a beachcomber who appears again in *The Narrow Corner*, he hears that Strickland worked as a stoker before earning passage for Papeete; from Tiaré Johnson, the half-caste proprietress of the hotel, that a 'marriage' had been arranged with Ata, a native girl; from M. Cohen, a French trader, that Strickland paid his bill with a canvas, predicting one day its great worth; from Captain Brunet, that Strickland and Ata went deep into the brush to live on her small property; and from Dr. Coutras, that the painter, blind and dying of leprosy, ordered Ata on his death to set fire to their house and to destroy the murals he had finished. It was a mark of the man's wilful consistency that, having at last found what he wanted, having created these magnificent portraits, he chose to obliterate them as a supreme gesture of contempt for the world's opinion. This study of revolt and ultimate freedom rivals even the Gidean ideal, but is attainable only in the East, far removed from the shackles of Western civilisation.

The book concludes, fittingly enough, with the vain attempts of Strickland's son to whitewash his father's character. Thanks to the indefatigable efforts of a German scholar, a psychopathologist who 'believes that human nature is not only about as bad as it can be, but a great deal worse' and who 'has an unerring eye for the despicable motive in actions that have all the appearance of innocence', Strickland's name is rescued from the decency of his son's protestations; after enjoying a *succès de scandale*, the painter is apotheosised as a first-rate villain-genius.

Although Gauguin was the springboard for the novelist's imagination, Maugham has taken a good many liberties with the facts. Gauguin is Strickland only as Leigh Hunt was Harold

Skimpole or Walter Savage Landor, Lawrence Boythorn. By examining Maugham's deviations, one can learn a great deal, not about the painter but about the author himself.

Gauguin's ancestry was part Peruvian; perhaps he was never quite at home in the French capital. Not a heritage but a vision drove Strickland from England. Gauguin had already exhibited his paintings before he left Paris; he had no need to hide them from a domineering partner like Mrs. Strickland. Strickland was happy in his island paradise; Gauguin tried to take his life. Strickland thumbed his nose at the world by his last instructions to Ata, perhaps indicating his creator's equal scorn; there is no evidence that Gauguin destroyed his final work. Madame Gauguin, a pretty Danish woman, seems to have been essentially pleasant; Mrs. Strickland, as a decorous married woman is naturally the opposite, justifying Strickland's comment: 'My wife is an excellent woman; I wish she was in Hell.' Under different names, she continues to appear with frequency in all Maugham's subsequent works. Finally, he invents two characters who are as exclusively his as though they had been rubber-stamped: Robert Strickland, the son, is a prig and a fool and therefore a clergyman; Ata, the native girl, is by conventional standards a kept woman and therefore a noble-hearted one.

Two now-familiar elements run their course in the novel: a love that is purely instinctual and a love that is never returned. Blanche, the victim of the first, spurns her reason to follow her heart, regardless of the consequences. (She recalls Maugham's Liza and prefigures his Kitty of *The Painted Veil* and his Lydia of *Christmas Holiday*; all find their counterparts in numerous Schnitzler heroines who are also betrayed by passion). Dirk Stroeve, the victim of the second, suffers as cruelly as Philip Carey. Both Stroeve and Philip worship women who reject them for far less admirable men; both take a strange delight in abasement and self-torment. Yet when Philip gives Mildred money to go to Oxford with Griffiths, one may feel impatience, but sympathy is mixed with it; when Stroeve walks out of his studio so that Strickland and Blanche may live there and then dogs Blanche's footsteps in complete abjection, one feels only contempt. This reaction is caused to some degree by Maugham's

description of Stroeve (nature has given him the heart of a sentimentalist and the exterior of a clown), and to a greater degree by Maugham's treatment of him: the author's compassion is now tinged with bitter mockery. As a result, Stroeve becomes Philip seen through a distorting mirror, as though Maugham were determined to divorce himself from Philip's weakness by passing judgement on it.

The love of Ata is very different. It is not instinctual or unrequited; nor is it, like Mrs. Strickland's, possessive. Because she allows the painter to go his own way, it is Ata who wins him in the end. In his travel book, *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, Maugham tells the story of a nightingale who cannot sing because he has been caged, but when the princess who has held him captive gives him his liberty he comes back of his own volition to enchant her with his melody. This is ideal love, the love Maugham confesses he never found.

Strickland's attitude strikes a contrasting vein. He has neither the time nor the patience for love and expresses contempt for women because they can think of nothing else in life: 'It's an insignificant part. I know lust. That's normal and healthy. Love is a disease.' He shares Shaw's conviction that 'the world's books get written, its pictures painted, its statues modelled, its symphonies composed, by people who are free from the otherwise universal dominion of the tyranny of sex.' But Shaw's defence of the artist's freedom carries the impatience of a wayward child unjustly disciplined by unsympathetic parents: whenever the artist—or the child—would follow his immediate interests he is blocked by practical considerations and conventional morality. Strickland's viewpoint, however, indicates more than simple rebellion: it demonstrates a positive hatred of the restraining element—woman. Maugham, in the character of Ashenden, delves further into Strickland's personality: 'When he had regained command over himself, he shuddered at the sight of the woman he had enjoyed . . . and he felt towards her the horror that perhaps the painted butterfly, hovering about the flowers, feels to the filthy chrysalis from which it has triumphantly emerged . . . The normal release of sex . . . seemed brutal by comparison with the satisfaction of artistic creation.' Strickland's



rage at the thought of his physical dependence, however brief, on a woman could easily form the basis of a Freudian *dossier*, but Maugham, as usual, is content to draw inferences and not to offer conclusions. In any case, Strickland proves the victory of art over life as well as the conquest of man, the creator, over woman, the destroyer; though Strickland's behaviour is sometimes short of admirable, he knows, like Shaw's Louis Dubedat, that he has kept faith with his ideal.

*The Moon and Sixpence* etches several designs which Maugham had hitherto only sketched. In his previous books he had made unworthy women the target of his criticism; this novel marks a turning-point in his method of attack: his abhorrence of respectable wives now seems to issue from a day-to-day practical experience of their vices rather than from a nodding acquaintance with them. The coils of Western civilisation also tighten round him as never before: he introduces a minor character, Abraham, who forsakes a brilliant medical future in London to become a poor doctor in the islands; his friends deplore his lamentable instability, failing to realise that in his own way and on his own terms he has, like Strickland, found success. Finally, *The Moon and Sixpence* contains a deepening note of melancholy. Ashenden broods over man's inability to communicate with his neighbour: 'We go lonely, side by side but not together, unable to know our fellows and unknown by them.' This theme has occupied a host of Maugham's contemporaries, from Schnitzler, who made it the basis of a play translated as *The Lonely Way*, and Chekhov, to T. S. Eliot, whose heroine of *The Cocktail Party* reflects that people 'make noises, and think they are talking to each other; they make faces and think they understand each other.' They do not believe with Conrad that 'no human being could bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad'; true children of the twentieth century, they accept their isolation with a sigh.

From the standpoint of technique, *The Moon and Sixpence* is another advance in Maugham's career. Its main portions are prefaced by discourses on art, philosophy and letters, suggesting the leisurely pace of eighteenth-century novels. This style of presentation is utilised again in *Cakes and Ale* and *The Razor's*

*Edge* and is an indication of the author's ability in yet another field: belles-lettres, a form to which he devoted his later years.

The oblique construction of the book is one of Maugham's happiest inventions. Like Conrad's Marlow, Ashenden tells the story after gathering information from various sources; he performs the same function in *Cakes and Ale*; so does the fictional Mr. Maugham of *The Razor's Edge*. Unlike Conrad, however, Maugham does not employ this device to encourage a character's self-examination, nor does he, like Joyce, allow the commentator to dive into the subconscious; in Maugham's unique use of the first person, the narrator is an entertaining host describing to his guests a series of events which he has witnessed and which are indisputably authentic. Maugham has averred that his favourite type of tale usually contains an anecdote which could easily be told over the dinner-table.

When he set about writing *The Moon and Sixpence*, Maugham went to Tahiti in order to collect background material for his subject. Grant Overton has reported that in following Maugham's movements, the better to learn how the novel was created, he stopped at Papeete and questioned the natives about their distinguished visitor. No one there seemed to remember him; even the hotel-keeper whom Maugham had almost exactly transferred to the pages as Tiaré could recollect only that a quiet-mannered gentleman speaking beautiful Parisian French wandered about making enquiries and taking notes; how he acted, what he looked like—she was uncertain. Maugham has always derived a discreet amusement from giving his public image the slip.

*The Moon and Sixpence* was an immediate popular success, finally confirming his 'arrival' as a novelist. Although a few reviewers saw the book as a savage parody on a great artist, the more objective critics cherished it for its freedom from sentimental cant, its anti-heroic realism and its penetrating characterisation. Its tone indicates the trend of his future work: henceforward he paints pictures of life which buttress and exemplify his sardonic outlook—with one exception.

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The East continued to hold Maugham in its grip. Now in his

'competent' fifties, he wrote three novels, two of which were set in exotic lands: *The Painted Veil* (1925) and *The Narrow Corner* (1932). During this decade he also produced the remainder of his plays, the best of his short stories and the most memorable of his travel books.

One of the latter, *On a Chinese Screen*, contains Maugham's impressions of the Orient: in it are descriptions of places, people, events. Selecting some of the material and inventing the rest, he completed *The Painted Veil* which studies the lives of a British couple in Hong-Kong. Walter Fane learns that his deeply-adored wife, Kitty, has been unfaithful; to punish her he gives her the alternative of either coming with him to a distant, disease-ridden town where he, as a bacteriologist, can help check the epidemic or of being divorced by him with the stipulation that her lover divorce his wife to marry Kitty. Exactly as Walter surmises, Kitty's lover, Charles Townsend, grows panicky at the thought of any scandal and urges Kitty to quit Hong-Kong with her husband. Since Charles rejects her, she has no choice but to accompany Walter on his mission which, Kitty senses, Walter undertook in the expectation that the cholera would kill her. After arriving in the town where people are dying by the hundreds, Kitty, in her desperate unhappiness, prays for death which comes not to her but to Walter who with his last breath murmurs, 'The dog it was that died', a quotation from Gray's poem reflecting the ironic twist in Walter's plans. Kitty, about to bear her lover's child, returns to Hong-Kong on her way back to England; before she leaves for Europe she succumbs once more to Charles, although her husband is hardly in his grave. Shaken by the blindness of her instincts yet determined to atone for her past life, she goes to England to seek out her father whom she has always ignored and despised, to give him the love and understanding she has so long withheld. In their mutual discovery of the bond between them, Kitty and her father find hope for the future. As she dreams of her child yet to be born she gives voice to what is in her heart: 'It's all confused, but vaguely I discern a pattern, and I see before me an inexhaustible richness, the mystery and the strangeness of everything, compassion and charity, the Way and the Wayfarer, and perhaps in the end—God.'

Although love's torments twist like scarlet threads through the black background of death that enshrouds the novel, the tone is one of gentleness and tranquillity, an unexpected shift from Maugham's usual stance. Obviously deeply moved by his first contact with China, in this book he examines the universe through a totally different type of viewing-glass. The portraits of the French nuns who dedicate their lives to religion show him at his most kindly. Even the cynical *raisonneur*, Waddington, who grows more philosophical with every drink, is not an objective spectator but a subjective participant: his attempts to save Kitty from her great suffering endow him with a rare humanity. But of course Waddington, though an Englishman, has developed an Oriental point of view through his long residence in China and his protracted liaison with a Chinese aristocrat, and so escapes the bondage of Western conventions. The shy and tortured Walter is not a figure of fun, like Dirk Stroeve, or a victim of self-abasement, like Philip Carey; Walter has pride, dignity and courage. Kitty herself is the creation of a master: though Maugham had already demonstrated his remarkable insight into feminine psychology with *Mrs. Craddock*, his grasp of Kitty's character is much stronger. In the beginning, she seems no better than his run-of-the-mill females: she is an egotistical, pampered belle who accepts her first proposal out of a fear of spinsterhood; after her marriage she barely tolerates her husband's devotion and soon grows exasperated by his deference. She appropriates everything—his love, his protection, his financial support—and gives nothing in return save betrayal and contempt. Later, when her lover abandons her she comes to understand the meaning of unrequited passion and there dawns on her the extent of her husband's anguish, for she has been made to suffer exactly as he has. Although she cannot love Walter she longs to alleviate his pain; for once in her trumpery life she considers someone else. At the end, she is cleansed by her shattering experience: the defection of her lover, the tragic death of her husband, the impending birth of her child, the nobility of the nuns, the magnificence of the Orient which even the plague cannot dim—all impinge on Kitty's consciousness and bring her to maturity. On this single occasion Maugham acknowledges that a shabby

character can be redeemed. Unlike Bertha Craddock or Blanche Stroeve, Kitty uses her reason to rescue her; realising that her superficial nature has been shaped by the empty conventions of her social set in England, she vows that her baby, if a girl, will not be reared in the same shallow tradition. Face to face with the wonder and the splendour of the East, Kitty takes its beauty 'as the believer takes in his mouth the Wafer which is God.' It is not accidental that the hero of *Of Human Bondage* should discover life's pattern not in a tapestry, which might have a European origin, but in a Persian carpet.

More than any of Maugham's previous novels, *The Painted Veil* suggested, because of its tight structure and its incisive dialogue, that this was a playwright's book. The dramatic opening is a case in point: Kitty, locked in her bedroom with her lover, fancies she hears someone rattling the knob of her door. Instantly Maugham creates a tension which never relaxes; there is nothing of the comfortable jog-trot he had employed in *The Moon and Sixpence*. Indeed, so anxious was he to speed the narrative of *The Painted Veil*, so determined to make the reader finish it at a single sitting, as though in a playhouse, that he had the book printed in a way which would minimise the space between each chapter. No detail of his craft has ever escaped him in his desire to achieve a calculated effect. He has said also that he was aiming here for a 'punch'; he succeeded in a manner he had not anticipated. Although the critics praised the novel as a whole, a few declared themselves revolted by Kitty's second moral lapse (their squeamishness at Maugham's candid disclosure of the sexual drive makes one wonder whether the twenties were as 'roaring' as historians insist), while a number labelled her change of heart at the conclusion 'rank sentimentality'. Apparently they had forgotten the reproaches of 'brutality' which they had hurled against Maugham when he left the hero of *The Moon and Sixpence* unregenerated. Like the lamb of Aesop's fable who could never justify himself to an opponent determined to quarrel on any grounds, Maugham could never please his detractors regardless of what he did. He showed commendable wisdom in going his own way 'with a shrug of the shoulder.'

As a mountaineer breathes in the pure air about him and

feels the paltry problems and the painful thorns of daily life dropping away, so did Maugham from his freshly-scaled height of understanding behold a 'new heaven and a new earth'. Perhaps the atmosphere was too rarefied; perhaps the steep ascent was too dizzying. Whatever the cause, *The Narrow Corner* was a headlong plunge into *tedium vitæ*.

Set in the Malay Archipelago, the story is thinner than is usual with Maugham. A young Dane, engaged to a beautiful girl who admires but does not love him, kills himself when he finds she has betrayed him with another man. The latter, feeling responsible for the Dane's suicide, in shame and horror leaves the girl and sails away. Somewhat later, he disappears from the ketch, perhaps pushed overboard by a rascally sea-captain coveting his money. It is likely that Maugham minimised the plot because this time he was more interested in the philosophy which his characters epitomise.

Erik Christessen (the derivation of his last name is significant) represents a type that, paradoxically, enmeshes Maugham in direct proportion to his increasing scepticism: Erik is a watered-down Alyosha Karamazov, pure and simple of heart. (In an entry for 1933 from *A Writer's Notebook*, Maugham records that when he was told of a young Frenchman who had been a model of saintliness, he was impelled to fashion a narrative of the facts given him: 'I was interested in the influence the life and death of this poor boy had on those who had been in contact with him; but it was too difficult for me to cope with and I never wrote it.') Erik, a weaver of beautiful, romantic dreams, is unselfish, sincere, ignorant of guile or meanness. But this noble idealism is fragile armour which, when colliding with the baser impulses of humanity—in short, with reality—splinters at the core.

Janus-like, Maugham flips the other side of the coin to produce Captain Nichols, a scoundrel capable of any crime which can be committed or imagined. Since he is the winner in the battle of existence and Erik the loser, the novel actually becomes a study of the problem of good and evil. Serving as referee between these opposing poles of ethical warfare is Dr. Saunders, to whom 'right and wrong were no more than good weather and

bad weather . . . he was influenced in his actions neither by love, pity nor charity.'

Just as the author's Rogue's Gallery is more enjoyable than his hagiology, so is Captain Nichols, amusing but cruel, brave but henpecked by a termagant wife, more impressive than Erik. The novel, however, belongs to Dr. Saunders, the *raisonneur*, who confesses himself baffled by goodness: 'It's shattering. One doesn't know what to do about it. It knocks human relations endways.' And when he tries to console the young man who inadvertently caused Erik's death, he observes: 'Life is short, nature is hostile, and man is ridiculous; but . . . with a certain humour and a good deal of horse-sense one can make a fairly good job of what is after all a matter of very small consequence.' Accused of being content to wallow in the gutter, he retorts: 'I get a certain amount of fun from watching the antics of the other creatures that dwell there . . . So long as I can laugh the gods may destroy me but I remain unvanquished.'

Through *The Narrow Corner* flows another current: the religion of the East, presented not as an emotional experience (such as Kitty undergoes in *The Painted Veil*) but as an intellectual debate: the girl's father, Frith, expounds Vedanta with impressive ease and scholarship. But as Maugham has made Frith an egotistical bore who is no match for the sardonic Dr. Saunders, one is not inclined to take his teachings seriously. Both in creating Erik and in exploring Vedanta, Maugham seems to be experimenting: his footsteps sound tentative as he picks his way through previously uncharted territory.

If the book's point is somewhat puzzling (perhaps because Maugham had been caught up too strongly in the subject without settling the turmoil in his own mind: a year later, contrary to custom, he allowed his pre-occupation with matters of faith and doubt to enter a play of his, *Sheppey*, which also confused his audience), the tone, at any rate, is unmistakable. The indulgent smile of *The Painted Veil* has yielded to an off-key laughter tinged with grief, as though Maugham, in resigning himself to the poverty of man's nature, could not repress the accompanying pangs of disappointment: Kitty believes that she will one day understand the meaning of life and find the Way; Dr. Saunders

reflects that 'if the richest dreams that the imagination offered came true, in the end it remained nothing but illusion.' In *The Narrow Corner*, the once-caustic quality of Maugham's writing turns septic.

The reviews were grudgingly friendly, several critics noting a strong resemblance to Stevenson's *Ebb-Tide*, a similar tale of three beach-combers in the Islands. But Stevenson hunted for adventure, while Maugham grappled with the Unknown. Both writers, regarding identical objects, discovered different secrets. As a ray of light refracted by a prism produces varied colours of the spectrum, so does the universe reflected by the artist produce unique visions of humanity.

With an abrupt switch in mood and setting Maugham published *Cakes and Ale* (1932), appropriately taking his title from a festive passage between the revellers in *Twelfth Night*. The book is presented as a footnote to the life and times of a recently-deceased Grand Old Man of English Letters whose story is told by 'an older, wiser, but not kinder narrator', Willie Ashenden, by now a familiar acquaintance.

Edward Driffield in his youth struggles against heavy odds to win recognition as a writer. He and his wife, Rosie, settle in Blackstable where they first meet Willie, who is fifteen. Willie's uncle, the vicar, an extension of Philip Carey's guardian, considers the Driffields 'undesirables', an opinion shared by the rest of the community. After a time the couple leave for London; gradually Driffield wins the laurels he has long sought, but Rosie, now bored with her existence as the elaborately snubbed wife of a genius, elopes with a married man, one of many she has known—in the Biblical sense—and disappears from England. Driffield's health breaks under the blow; after he recovers he divorces Rosie and marries his nurse, who guards him jealously. Though he owes his best books to the years he shared with Rosie, his reputation grows in lustre under the watchful guidance of the second Mrs. Driffield. She is a perfect wife, an echo of Mrs. Strickland of *The Moon and Sixpence*, and an equally detestable woman.

The tale unfolds in the present when Willie, now an author of repute himself, is asked by the widowed Mrs. Driffield and her



good friend, Alroy Kear, the novelist, to furnish particulars about her husband's early life so that Kear may complete a biography of the great man. The suggestion causes Willie to think back over the past when Driffield and Rosie were upstarts in Blackstable. He recalls a number of unsavoury details: the inability of the Driffields to pay their bills; Driffield's scapegrace days, his low tastes and habits; Rosie's tender-hearted and casual amorality; her present whereabouts in Yonkers, New York, the knowledge of which would prove a bombshell to Mrs. Driffield and Kear, since everyone believes Rosie, 'the skeleton in the cupboard', to be dead. Kear and Mrs. Driffield reject Willie's information (an adoring public must not have its illusions shattered), and Kear writes Driffield's biography in a properly expurgated fashion. Needless to say, it is a success.

In *Cakes and Ale* Maugham chose to stress character rather than plot: he painted a triptych, with Rosie, a former barmaid, as its centre. Far from behaving like the nymphomaniac Freudians accuse her of being, Rosie has a sane and wholesome, if unique, attitude towards sex. Regarding the act as inconsequential and impersonal, almost as a man might, she bestows herself on her admirer of the moment with a simple and unaffected kindness that attaches no obligation to the favour; because she is emotionally uncomplicated she is unafflicted with the disease of possessiveness. In contrast to the scene-provoking females commonly encountered in fiction (and in life), Rosie is a rare and tangy barbiturate that cannot be taken too often. It was thirty years before Maugham could hit upon a story into which she might satisfactorily fit and through her he was able to prove one of his representative themes: those capable of disregarding convention are the true heirs of freedom.

The other two panels, comprising Driffield and Kear, were thought to have been patterned after Thomas Hardy and Hugh Walpole. Maugham denied the first charge, insisting that he founded Edward Driffield on an unknown writer who had lived in Whitstable in Maugham's childhood. But because he had seen old and distinguished authors receive the homage of their admirers, 'I had sometimes asked myself whether at such moments

their minds ever carried them back to their obscure and tumultuous youth and whether when they looked at the ladies who gazed at them, their eyes misty with adoration, or listened gravely to the earnest young men who told them how great an influence their works had had on them, they did not chuckle within themselves and with amusement wonder what those admirers would say if they knew the whole truth about them.' Was it possible, Maugham reflected with the humorist's eye for chiaroscuro, that they might be weary of all this incense-burning? And after turning this idea over in his mind, he fashioned Driffield. However, Maugham admitted that Alroy Kear was Walpole, though modified; wishing to spare the latter, he attempted to conceal the character by incorporating the traits of various writers, including himself. As Walpole was notorious for several sharp—and persuasive—practices (taking critics to luncheon so that they might review his subsequent books more favourably was one of them), it was inevitable that the disguise should be penetrated. Maugham concludes that if Walpole's ghost 'remembers how I mocked at his ambition one day to be the grand old man of English literature, he must chuckle with malicious glee when he sees that I, even I, who laughed at him, seem to be on the verge of reaching that sad, absurd and transitory eminence.'

The strength of the novel lies in its magnificent satire. (There had been a hint of what Maugham could do in this direction in *Of Human Bondage*, where he introduced the reader to a literary critic who wrote so lucid and detailed a review of a certain book that there remained no reason for the public to buy it). In *Cakes and Ale*, critics, literary lions and their tamers, bores, hangers-on—all who make their appearance seem drawn from life. So keen were Maugham's shafts that in the following year Evelyn Mordaunt, under the pen-name of 'A. Riposte', published a counter-attack with *Gin and Bitters*.

The hero of this philippic is a small, sallow-faced, dark-haired man 'whose eyes are as sad and disillusioned as those of a sick monkey.' He travels constantly, using people without any sort of scruple; he accepts their hospitality and then puts them bodily—their most private affairs, their problems, their loves and hates and sorrows—into his books. His victims swear that they

will never again entertain an author, for they have suffered too much. Although he is acclaimed as a great writer he is unable to create anything unless he has living material to work from: even when his wife quarrels with him he tip-toes over to his desk, takes some cards from the drawer and records her words and actions for a future novel. He dies alone, hated, unmourned. Though 'A. Riposte' insisted in the foreword that no actual portrait was intended, it was unmistakable.

Lacking Maugham's skillful irony, *Gin and Bitters* shot wide of its target, but it did indicate the general temperature raised by Maugham's *succès de scandale*. Now the smoke of battle has cleared away *Cakes and Ale* can be appreciated for itself. Maugham's dexterity was never more brilliantly displayed than by the seeming digressions he employed to link the story: they are essays in miniature (Maugham regarded his growing fondness for this form as a sign of middle age) In addition, he handled the time shift from present to past and back again through the Proustian device of involuntary memory, not in order to plumb the stream of consciousness but to steer the tale forward. The novel is his favourite because 'in its pages lives for me again the woman with the lovely smile who was the model for Rosie Driffield.' Alexander Woollcott believed *Cakes and Ale* 'unsurpassed in our language and our time.' With *Of Human Bondage* it is probably Maugham's most enduring work.



In the next two 'superficial' decades of Maugham's career, before bidding farewell to fiction-writing, he completed seven novels. Of these only two are important, the other five being readable but trivial. The weakest are *Up at the Villa* (1941) and *The Hour Before the Dawn* (1942). The first, which Morton Zabel in an irate review called 'calculated and heartless drivel', concerns a solid empire-builder of mature years who is engaged to a pretty widow considerably younger than himself. To his horror he learns that out of pity she has given herself to a refugee Austrian violinist who later commits suicide when she dismisses him. The empire-builder (described in the beginning as brown-eyed, in the end as blue-eyed) cannot believe that this is the

woman who would be a fitting helpmeet to a man of his position; she eventually marries a scapegrace, who is fond of quoting Samuel Johnson, after they discover their mutual love when hiding the corpse of the violinist from the police. The levity with which the problem of the refugee is treated is distasteful; the old formula of the wicked being more agreeable than the respectable does not succeed. The whole book, in fact, sounds like a parody of its author. The second, *The Hour Before the Dawn*, is also unsatisfactory, if somewhat higher-minded. Written at the request of the British government, it is frankly a propaganda novel which surveys England during her most trying hour; it preaches courage, faith and optimism. (Again Maugham managed to introduce the sub-plot of a treacherous woman and her helpless victim of a husband; with these two books, however, Maugham finally shut the door on a subject which had obsessed him for many years). As both novels were written immediately after the outbreak of the second World War and Maugham's flight from France, it is not surprising that they showed signs of haste and carelessness.

The other three, though of varying merit, are strung together by one idea—the importance of art over life—and are suffused with the same irony. *Theatre* (1937) examines the private affairs of a celebrated English actress who, like Bertha Craddock, has married a man too frigid to appreciate her passion. Approaching the shoals of middle-age and its attendant emotional crises, she takes a young lover but loses him to a girl of his own years. Yet, once her anguish has spent itself, she faces the future with equanimity for she believes that the satisfactions of her profession outweigh the disappointments of her personal experience. People to her are no more than the actor's raw material: 'We take their silly little emotions and turn them into art . . . They are the shadows and we give them substance. We are the symbols of all this confused, aimless struggling that they call life . . . They say acting is make-believe. That make-believe is the only reality.' Moving from social to political satire, Maugham produced his first historical novel in half a century, *Then and Now* (1946). (Critics who believed that he was too much of a realist to handle this genre were surprised by the ease he showed in weaving fact

and fiction). Set in the days of Machiavelli and enriched with observations that are pertinent today, as its title indicates, the book issues a warning: 'In this world of sin and sorrow . . . if good overcomes evil, it is not because it is good, but because it has a well-lined purse. It is well to have right on our side, but it is madness to forget that unless we have might as well it will avail us nothing.' The plot, however, concentrates on Machiavelli's plans—to seduce a pretty widow—which are frustrated by a young and handsome rival. Machiavelli is naturally infuriated by the knowledge that he has been used to further the pleasure of another, but he has his revenge. He determines to write a play, taking the incidents of his disappointment as the basis of the action. The comedy is, of course, *La Mandragola*. Machiavelli consoles himself: 'What is love in comparison with art? . . . Love is transitory, but art is eternal . . . The creation of man was not even a tragic mistake, it was a grotesque mischance. What is its justification? Art, I suppose. So when you come to look at it, it's all turned out for the best. I lost a trinket and picked up a jewel fit for a crown.' More successfully, Maugham trained the barrage of his raillery on religion with *Catalina* (1948), partly a satire, partly a fairy-tale. Catalina, a pretty girl of sixteen living in the time and country of Don Quixote, after being crippled in an accident is told by a strange lady that she will be cured by one of three brothers who has best served God. The lady is the Virgin Mary; the healer is not the famous and saintly Bishop or his war-like and dashing brother but the youngest of the three—a common baker. Catalina recovers, resists pressure to make a religious of her, marries the young man of her choice and becomes in after years a renowned actress. When the Bishop attends one of her performances, he is so stirred by the beauty and holiness of the drama, which deals with Mary Magdalene, that all the torments harrowing him fade before the reality of what he sees and hears: 'I tasted of the wonderful peace that passeth all understanding, I drank of the wisdom of God and I knew His secrets. I felt myself filled with all good and emptied of all evil . . . I possessed God and in possessing Him possessed everything.' And the cream of the jest, unknown to the pious Bishop, lies in the fact that the play is

written by a dissolute and worthless author and presented by a group of quarrelling vagabonds. Art too performs its miracles.

Far more compelling than any of the novels Maugham completed in this decade are *Christmas Holiday* and *The Razor's Edge*, the first written in 1939, just before the war's outbreak, the second in 1944, just before its close. *Christmas Holiday* is a deceptively simple story. It tells of young Charley Mason's jaunt to Paris during the festive season when he meets again his old Cambridge friend, Simon, now a reporter. But Simon is no ordinary journalist; he is a dictator in the making. He tries to stifle his affection for Charley, whom he formerly admired, because he realises that even the slightest sentiment is dangerous to a man who means to control a country: he will be satisfied only when he has torn all feeling of kinship with the human race from his breast. The good-tempered Charley does not take Simon seriously; he cannot believe that Simon's programme is the wave of the future nor can he persuade himself that Simon's ideas are much more than the expression of a tormented and frustrated soul. But then, who took Hitler seriously in the days of the beer-hall putsch?

Charley suffers a second shock when he encounters Lydia, a White Russian who earns her living in a bordello so that the agony she suffers may atone for the murder which her husband has committed and for which he has been sentenced to Devil's Island. (Her husband Robert, incidentally, who proves a particularly ardent lover immediately after he has left the scene of his crime, is another brilliant vignette: in his eyes, sex and violence are inextricably joined; Maugham, however, avoids the pitfalls of Freudian investigation, flatteringly allowing the reader to dot the i's and cross the t's). Through her passionate devotion to Robert, although she realises his utter worthlessness and his inability to return her love in kind, Lydia feels that in some mystic fashion she can redeem him from his sin. Maugham apprehends the workings of the Russian temperament: 'The Russian sets store on self-abasement because it comes easily to him; he can accept humiliation because to humiliate himself gives him a singular sensual gratification.' This insight is natural to

Maugham, for the hero of *Of Human Bondage* also experiences Lydia's emotional degradation.

The pivotal character of Charley supports the book's theme. Charming, self-confident, sheltered, he comes to Paris to visit his friend, but meets a stranger dedicated to destroying all that the civilised world holds dear. He comes to Paris to 'do' the art galleries, but learns that pictures are worthless unless they speak directly to the beholder, regardless of academic pronouncements. He comes to Paris to enjoy himself with a tart, but finds himself listening to her tragic tale. Charley returns to his tidy universe a little more bewildered, a little more tolerant, and a little more aware of man's inconsistency. Like Philip Carey, he too serves his apprenticeship.

In his next novel Maugham demonstrated how-up-to-date he could be despite his Edwardian roots. The authors of the 1920s, not content with viewing the shattered edifice of Victorian convention, had continued to batter the remnants. The early works of Aldous Huxley, for example, were the natural result of an attitude that demolished without rebuilding. Equally natural was the reaction that followed: the hunt for a lost faith, different though the form might be. Gerald Heard pioneered the new movement with *The Social Substance of Religion* (1931), emphasising the necessity for a return to belief as the only cure for the soul's ills. Succumbing to his message, Huxley, Isherwood and others soon joined the congregation and preached Vedanta to the western world. One year after Heard published his manifesto, Maugham wrote *The Narrow Corner*, touching briefly and unconvincingly upon Hinduism and the excellencies of the spiritual life; by 1944, he was ready for a second—and successful—try.

Larry, the American hero of *The Razor's Edge* (Maugham's choice of nationality was the fruit of his protracted stay in and closer acquaintance with the United States), has been an aviator in the first World War; when he sees his best friend shot down, he begins to ask questions that have never before occurred to him. In order to find the answer to the enigma of existence, he reads omnivorously, studies Greek (Maugham once expressed regret

that he had never learnt it), renounces the young woman he loves, travels round the world, finally absorbs the mysticism of India's holy men (again the East rather than the West is the gangway to freedom), surrenders his meagre patrimony and becomes a taxi-driver in New York—a tribe well known for its originals.

Larry is a synthesis of three Maugham characters: the quixotic Erik, the Vedanta-teaching Frith, both of *The Narrow Corner*, and the rebellious Edward of his short story, *The Fall of Edward Barnard*. Erik believes in the good, and beautiful and the true, but since his idealism is due to an innate nobility and lacks the reinforcement of a practical philosophy, he does not survive; Frith discovers the correct system, but as he does not utilise it to improve his nature, he remains a second-rate human being; Edward secures his haven in the South Sea Islands, remote from the strictures of western civilisation, but while attaining greater happiness than the other two is little more than an escapist. Larry, however, possesses the kindness of Erik's temperament, the strength of Frith's knowledge and the courage of Edward's dream.

Although Larry's 'goodness' is described at length, he emerges as a somewhat shadowy figure, for an Alyosha Karamazov is beyond the sight-lines of a humorist like Maugham. To counter this shortcoming, Maugham adopts an impressive strategical device: he begins the novel by admitting his inability to fathom Larry's labyrinthine personality or to accept his peculiar point of view; Maugham anticipates the reader's incredulity and by confessing that he shares it curtails much of the opposition. Larry may not be the offspring of a genius's imagination but he is the handiwork of a master craftsman.

If Larry is the 'nursling of the Sky', his friends are very much the children of the Earth. Outstanding among them is Elliott Templeton, who might have stepped from the drawing-room of *Our Betters*. A wealthy American who owes his fortune to a taste for art and an eye for its market-value, Elliott becomes a devout Catholic as one might join an exclusive club; his vision of heaven is filled with Louis Quinze furniture and persons of title. His niece, Isabel, Larry's one-time betrothed, is the same Isabel of



*The Fall of Edward Barnard*, though drawn with greater perspective. When she first makes her appearance at the age of nineteen, she is pretty, gay and matter-of-fact; as the years slip by she becomes beautiful, frivolous and cold-hearted, for unlike Kitty of *The Painted Veil*, she turns her back on redemption. Her character does not change; it simply turns down the wrong corridor, leaving one with a poignant sense of loss. A fitting foil to Isabel, worshipper at the shrine of position and respectability, is Sophie, the unfortunate victim of a tragic accident. Robbed of her husband and her baby in a motor crash, she is transformed into a hopeless drunkard and a drug addict, her conduct perhaps relieving her guilt in being alive while they are dead. Though Larry attempts to save her, she has no desire to 'play Mary Magdalene to his Jesus Christ'; she continues her downward course until she is found one morning in the river, her throat cut by a shady lover. Her melancholy end is the natural result of her enslavement to a passion severed in its prime.

The story is held together by the narrator, here called 'Mr. Maugham', the perfect realisation of Maugham's long line of *raisonneurs*: he is at once the interpreter between the world of Larry (the spirit) and that of Isabel (the flesh), and the filter through which the other characters express themselves. Further, by introducing himself as 'Mr. Maugham', the author of *The Moon and Sixpence*; by making 'Mr. Maugham' the British observer of the American social scene and by issuing a reminder that he is only an outsider who wishes to avoid Henry James' unsuccessful efforts to depict Englishmen; by acknowledging that many of the incidents in the book were relayed to him over long intervals of time and that he was forced to invent some of the dialogue since he was not always present to report it verbatim—by dwelling upon all these seemingly artless and candid statements, Maugham shatters the formal proscenium setting which usually divides author from reader and gives the action an intimacy comparable to that which is achieved when an audience watches the arena staging of a play. Lastly, 'Mr. Maugham' announces that the section dealing with Larry's conversion might well be skipped—but that without this account he would not

have considered it worth-while to write the book. This concluding stroke of ingenuity—as though ‘Mr. Maugham’ were dismissing matters of life and death in a parenthesis—erases any small residue of skepticism engendered by the novel’s theme; in *The Razor’s Edge*, Maugham pushes the commentator-for-realistic-effect to the boundary-line of fiction-writing.

When *The Razor’s Edge* appeared (and on both sides of the Atlantic the reaction was violently hostile or frantically enthusiastic), there were some who feared that it was a prelude to the author’s conversion. But even as Claudel never succeeded in influencing Gide, it is unlikely that the blandishments of Heard will ever persuade Maugham. He says in *A Writer’s Notebook*: ‘I find it impossible to believe that the soul thus contingent on the accidents of the body can exist in separation from it . . . When you see the dead, it can hardly fail to occur to you that they do look awfully dead.’ His intensely pragmatic approach to the riddle of life is one reason why Maugham shows such quizzical comprehension of the sinners of this world and such baffled admiration for the saints.



In 1895, when Maugham attained his majority, there were signs that the complacency of the Victorian Era would not long endure: the publications of Darwin, Marx and Freud forced three irreparable breaches in the dyke of accepted scientific, political and religious belief. Although in times past isolated groups had questioned the justice of the universe and the existence of divine law, while philosophers and poets had recorded their disillusion, never before had the sea of pessimism so completely inundated the globe.

Into this world of flood-level despair came such advocates of mechanistic determinism as Thomas Hardy, who saw man as a helpless toy destined to be broken by ‘The President of the Immortals’. But even for Hardy there was some grandeur, if little glory: he painted the *Götterdämmerung* of his age. For Maugham, in many ways Hardy’s heir, there is only a wasteland of trivia, ending ‘not with a bang, but a whimper’. In *The*

*Painted Veil*, Taoism is explained to a visitor in China: 'Tao. Some of us look for the Way in opium and some in God, some of us in whisky and some in love. It is all the same way and it leads nowhither.' Willie Ashenden of *Cakes and Ale* notices that whenever he is most serious people laugh at him, that there seems to be something absurd in a sincere emotion; he cannot understand why, 'unless it is that man, the ephemeral inhabitant of an insignificant planet, with all his pain and all his striving is but a jest in an eternal mind.' Dr. Saunders of *The Narrow Corner* affirms: 'Life is a connected and consistent dream, and when I cease to dream, the world, with its beauty, its pain and sorrow, its unimaginable variety, will cease to be.'

If Hardy shakes an impotent fist at the universe, Maugham lifts a Gallic shoulder in dismissal. Yet this indifference is only a cloak for the fury which now and again wells up in him: 'I'm glad I don't believe in God. When I look at the misery of the world and its bitterness I think no belief can be more ignoble', he recorded in *A Writer's Notebook* at twenty-seven. By the time he was sixty-seven, he had taught himself a resignation which relieved but did not heal his sorrow: 'It is the tragedy of our day that humble souls have lost their faith in God, in whom lay hope, and their belief in a resurrection that might bring them the happiness that has been denied them on earth; and have found nothing to put in its place.' Agnostic, part Stoic, part Epicurean, he concludes in *The Summing Up*: 'It may be that in the knowledge that man for all his weakness and sin is capable on occasion of splendour of spirit, one may find some refuge from despair.' Were the Deity to exist for Maugham, plainly He would not be One on Whom the author cared to leave his calling-card.

In his view of love, he shows an equal suspicion and distrust. Hardy, of course, shared this attitude, but Hardy was able to see men and women as equal victims of the force, whereas Maugham sees only that "The usual result of a man's co-habitation with a woman, however sanctioned by society, is to make him a little more petty, a little meaner than he would otherwise have been.' (In selecting a story by Schnitzler for inclusion in the anthology, *Tellers of Tales*, Maugham fastened on one least representative of the Viennese writer, 'The Fate of the Baron', which, as might

be expected, details the destruction of a man by a woman—a rare example of Schnitzler's unflattering treatment of the weaker sex). There are times when Maugham is lighter-hearted in his evaluation of this emotion, but a curtain of sadness still hangs over the scene, like brooding storm clouds in a summer sky.

If God and love fail humankind, the world of art remains. Because life does not hold sufficient attraction or meaning, it becomes important not of itself but for the inspiration it can give the artist. In *The Painted Veil*, when Kitty questions the purpose of existence, her friend remarks: 'I have an idea that the only thing which makes it possible to regard this world we live in without disgust is the beauty which now and then men create out of chaos. The pictures they paint, the music they compose, the books they write . . . ' And in *Cakes and Ale*, when Willie Ashenden notes the trials and tribulations of the writer, he also realises its singular compensation: 'Whenever he has anything on his mind, whether it be a harassing reflection, grief at the death of a friend, unrequited love, wounded pride, anger at the treachery of someone to whom he has shown kindness . . . he has only to put it down in black and white, using it as the theme of a story or the decoration of an essay, to forget all about it. He is the only free man.'

As a writer, Maugham has been reproached for his coldness and its concomitant aloofness, and indeed he says of himself in *Traveller's Library*: 'When on New Year's Eve people join hands and swinging them up and down to the music, like a nurse rocking the baby, sing lustily *Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot*, my shivering nerves whisper, yes, please.' Yet it is well to recollect that the 'jolly good fellow' does not necessarily possess warmth; the popularity cult, so prevalent today (in international as well as in personal relations) is often a mask for an icy ruthlessness. What deceives a number of people is Maugham's unvaried treatment of all shades of emotion: like Racine, he couples the inward flame with a frigid exterior. Walter Fane, of *The Painted Veil*, conceals his anguished longing for his wife by an impassive irony, while Philip Carey, of *Of Human Bondage*, caught in the springe of a hopeless infatuation, can only utter polite commonplaces. But there is usually a moment when these feelings are released,

and then, in the fashion of Racine's Phèdre, Maugham's characters pour out their tortured desires in a true *tirade*. It is indicative of his temperament that he should consider *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare's most interesting play: the seemingly indifferent Angelo, suddenly finding himself the prey of an unexpected passion, is a fitting subject for a Maugham situation. As for his much-mooted aloofness, Maugham, who received his early training in medicine, properly considers a scientific objectivity more serviceable than a benignant bed-side manner. Chekhov and Schnitzler, also doctors, share this quality with him: all three have auscultated the crumbling society of their day with compassionate detachment. The moody, feckless Russians of *The Cherry Orchard* and the irresponsible, pleasure-loving Viennese of *Komtesse Mizzi* beckon to the smart, Anglo-American parasites who populate *Our Betters* before they are all swept into the memory-box of Time.

Maugham has been censured for his cynicism and its consequent amorality. Admittedly, the milk of human kindness seems to have curdled in him when he observes: 'There is a satisfaction in doing what one wishes from altruistic motives'; 'It is just as well to let people tell you things when they want to . . . it disposes them kindly towards you if you suffer them to impart information'; 'One musn't expect gratitude . . . it's like a bonus on shares on which you've already received dividends'; 'Nothing is easier to bear with fortitude than other people's calamities'; 'When someone says a matter is important, it is more often important to him than to you . . . when it comes to making you a present or doing you a favour most people are able to hold their impatience within reasonable bounds'. However, such shafts have been loosed by Maugham's life-long association with the ways of the world and his extra-sensory perception of man's frailties; a reader with a sense of humour will appreciate the accuracy of the aim even if he becomes the bull's-eye, and only the cocky self-deceiver will resent the smarts. It behooves us to differentiate between Maugham's art of revealing and a lesser talent's trick of debasing. And perhaps this world of ours, which suffers more than ever from dictators who tell us how to think, advertisers who tell us how to live and psychologists who tell us

how to adjust, would be a trifle better for Maugham's brand of cynicism and amorality, since it can create a character who says: 'Nothing could shock him any longer. He knew by now that men were liars, he knew how extravagant was their vanity; he knew far worse than that about them; but he knew that it was not for him to judge nor to condemn.'

As a romantic who would believe but as a realist who must doubt, for more than fifty years Maugham has entertained and held his public, moving from the impatient anger of youth to the gracious serenity of age. If his Filippo of *The Making of a Saint* insisted that 'every man has sufficient sorrows of his own without taking to heart his neighbour's', his Larry of *The Razor's Edge* knows that 'it's easy enough to bear our own evils, all we need for that is a little manliness; what's intolerable is the evil, often so unmerited in appearance, that befalls others.' Like a sensitive physician attending his patient, Somerset Maugham has been able to diagnose our condition in a language we can understand; wary of prescribing, he nevertheless bids us remember that though we may not be fortunate enough to find release from bondage in the wisdom of the East or in devotion to the arts, at least we need not twist by our intolerance the chains our brothers wear.

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## MAUGHAM AND THE EAST

The Human Condition: Freedom

By Klaus W. Jonas

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### AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS

Looking through the bibliography of Somerset Maugham's writings, it is apparent how many of them have their setting in the Far East. Among these are four of his novels (*The Moon and Sixpence*, *The Painted Veil*, *The Narrow Corner*, and *The Razor's Edge*), two of his travel books (*On a Chinese Screen* and *The Gentleman in the Parlour*), two plays (*East of Suez* and *The Letter*) and several volumes of his short stories such as *The Trembling of a Leaf*, *The Casuarina Tree* and *Ah King*, collected and published under the title *East and West*. In all of them Maugham is primarily concerned with the presentation of the European in a strange, exotic environment and with the effect which remote outposts, tropical climate and the native population exercise upon him. When we compare the chronology of Maugham's 'exotic' writings with that of his own life we cannot fail to recognise the close connection between the two, and according to his own testimony these works are, to a large extent, the direct outcome of his long journeys to the Orient.

Although quantitatively these narratives and dramas amount to less than half of his collected writings, they are of far greater importance for his development as a man and as a writer than their actual volume would indicate. Moreover, the titles chosen by Maugham for the purpose of stressing the exotic element of the Far East reveal the importance which the author attaches to the oriental setting. *The Casuarina Tree*, *Honolulu, P. & O.*, *The Yellow Streak*, *Footprints in the Jungle*, and *East of Suez* are but a few examples. Finally, some of his earlier stories, written long before he undertook his journeys to the East, are indicative of the strong interest in the Orient which was then completely unknown to him.

Why did Maugham turn to the Far East, what was he looking for? And how did his experiences there prove useful to him?

The author has himself given us a detailed reply to these questions and explained the reasons which prompted him to travel to the Far East. According to his letter of December 6, 1928, addressed to Leslie A. Marchand, the idea of using the exotic background occurred to him more or less by chance as a result of his activities in the first World War, when his work in the Secret Service first took him into remote places.

"I think I had a vague impression that so far as I was concerned, I could not write any more novels about the English scene. I had put pretty well all my experiences into *Of Human Bondage* and I did not know how I was to follow that up. When I went down to the South Seas I came across a great many types that were entirely new to me, and situations which appealed to my imagination. I was very much struck by the effect of the climate and surroundings on the white people who for one reason or another had drifted there. So far as I was concerned I seemed to be entering upon an entirely new literary life, and after the war I deliberately travelled in search of this material . . . Perhaps it peculiarly appealed to me on account of my early years in France and other circumstances of my life which have prevented me from ever feeling entirely at home in England."

In *The Summing Up* Maugham discusses in greater detail his interest in the Orient and the world of the South Sea Islands. Since his early childhood, he tells us, he had wanted to go there and see those islands for whose charm he had been prepared through the works of Herman Melville and Pierre Loti.

Thus, according to Maugham's own statement, his first interest in the East had come by way of literature. In later years an additional reason was his search for material about the life and work of the French Impressionist Paul Gauguin, when Maugham had the intention of writing a novel based on the life of the great painter. Eventually this became the main motivation for his first trip to the South Seas during World War I and a visit to Tahiti, where Gauguin had spent the last years of his life. Maugham knew that the latter's art had found its ultimate expression there, and since his first visit there he himself felt more and more



attracted by the charm of Polynesia to which, in later years, he frequently returned.

Maugham's nostalgia for foreign countries finds its literary expression in the works that preceded *Of Human Bondage*. As early as 1904, when *The Merry-Go-Round* was published, we notice his interest in foreign countries and their manifold problems, and in his autobiographical novel (written between 1912 and 1915) his longing for the world of the Far East clearly manifests itself.

Fifteen years before starting on his first trip to the South Seas, Maugham wrote his novel *The Merry-Go-Round*, in which the character of Frank Hurrell, the young physician, undoubtedly bears strong autobiographical traits. He, too, feels compelled to leave the narrow monotony of life in London, which to him has become unbearable. He wants to see new countries, such as Canada and Australia. In him, as well as in Maugham, there is at first only one predominant desire: to escape to far-away countries, where life and its struggle with primitive nature still requires courage and a sense of adventure. Yet already in this novel, the transformation through which Maugham, as well as his hero, has passed becomes apparent; the general nostalgia for travel becomes centred on the Far East. Suddenly Frank Hurrell longs not only for other parts of the world but for the Orient:

"My whole soul aches for the East, Egypt and India and Japan; I want to know the corrupt, eager life of the Malays and the violent adventures of the South Sea Islands. I may not get an answer to the riddle of life out in the open world, but I shall get nearer to it than here. I can get nothing more out of books and civilisation. I want to see life and death, and the passions, the virtues and the vices of men face to face, uncovered; I want really to live my life while there's time; I want to have something to look back on in my old age."

There is a similarity with Philip Carey in *Of Human Bondage*; he, too, is convinced "that life is there to be lived rather than to be written about, to be filled with adventure and activity." He also knows, just as Frank Hurrell does, that for him the way to the East might become a way toward the understanding of the meaning of life. Therefore, after completing his

medical studies, he wants to see the world and, above all, visit the countries of the East: "I want to go to the East—the Malay Archipelago, Siam, China, and all that sort. I want to go from place to place. I want to see the world." As a ship's doctor he hopes to find an opportunity for the fulfillment of his dreams:

"He wished to go to the East, and his fancy was rich with pictures of Bangkok and Shanghai and the ports of Japan; he pictured to himself palm-trees and skies blue and hot, the dark-skinned people, pagodas; the scent of the Orient intoxicated his nostrils. His heart beat with passionate desire for the beauty and the strangeness of the world."

But it is not only mere love of adventure that makes him decide to see the world, he is filled with a deep desire to experience life. In order to explore the ultimate secrets of our existence, Philip wishes to live, perhaps for years, away from his own country:

"In unfrequented places, amid strange people, where life was led in strange ways. He did not know what he sought or what his journeys would bring him. But he had a feeling that he would learn something new about life and thus gain a clue to its mystery that he had solved only to find more mysterious. And even if he had found nothing he would allay the unrest which gnawed at his heart."

When Maugham himself first visited Polynesia he did so in the hope of finding "beauty and romance." He was filled by the "restlessness for the unknown" and sought change and "the excitement of the unforeseen." But in addition, he found something which he had never before expected and which became even more important for him: "I found a new self."

On all his travels to distant lands he was not only a pleasure seeker who enjoys comfort and luxury and who feels free from obligations and responsibilities, from "ties and duties." What he was actually looking for were "odd people," who amused him for some time or served him as models for the characters of his narratives. In *The Gentleman in the Parlour* he himself admits: "I am often tired of myself, and I have a notion that by travel I can add to my personality and so change myself a little. I do not bring back from a journey quite the same self that I took."

Thus both he and his philosophy of life undergo a basic transformation as a result of his encounter with new people whom he

meets in the East: "What excited me was to meet one person after another who was new to me." Since his early childhood and especially since leaving St. Thomas's Hospital in London, he had searched for the meaning of life, which his fellow-men saw in cultural achievements. Now, however, he met new types, and few, if any, of these people were "cultured" according to European standards:

"They had learned life in a different school from mine and had come to different conclusions. They led it on a different plane; I could not, with my sense of humour, go on thinking mine a higher one. It was different. Their lives, too, formed themselves to the discerning eye into a pattern that had order and finally coherence."

As we know, Maugham's interest in human nature has always been a decisive reason for his long travels. In spite of all his admiration for the ancient cultures of the Far East, his predominant reaction to man has always been one of amazement and sometimes even of awe:

"... Then it seemed to me that in these countries of the East the most impressive, the most awe-inspiring monument of antiquity is neither temple, nor citadel, nor great wall, but man. The peasant with his immemorial usages belongs to an age far more ancient than Angkor Wat, the great wall of China, or the Pyramids of Egypt."

Maugham also seems to be overcome by awe when people confide to him their innermost thoughts: "I held my breath, for to me there is nothing so awe-inspiring as when a man discovers to you the nakedness of his soul. Then you see that no one is so trivial or debased that in him is no spark of something to excite compassion."

Nowhere but in the Far East have strangers completely entrusted themselves to him: people whom he met in ships, clubs, bar rooms, hotels, or on lonely plantations and outposts. There he heard the stories which later filled his *Notebooks* and on which he drew for material for his fiction.

In the South Seas and in the Far East, Maugham tried above all to gain an insight into the contradictory motivations in man. These had already been of particular interest to him in people living in western surroundings. In Europe Maugham has never

found these contradictions in such an obvious form as in exotic regions, for European civilisation, he believes, exercises such a powerful influence upon man that he is unconditionally subjected to it. "Culture is a mask that hides their faces. Here people show themselves bare."

Because the study of man has always captivated Maugham's mind, he chose, after the completion of *Of Human Bondage*, other settings than the countries in which he had spent his youth and which he had used thus far. From now on places like the Malay Peninsula, Borneo, Singapore, and Polynesia serve him as scenic background. When asked by an American writer, Robert Van Gelder, "Why have you, after *Of Human Bondage*, so rarely returned to the English scene for your characters and background?", the author himself answered:

"In England, you know, civilisation goes fairly deep and it is an old civilisation. This makes for an apparent sameness in the people—one must go through many layers to discover what it is that sets each man apart, to discover the unique and the natural man. Every man is unique, of course, but the strangeness that makes a man a story, the oddity within him, is not easy to find in a man who wears his civilisation thickly. During the first World War I travelled, and after it my travels became extensive. In those parts of the world where civilisation is worn thinner, I found the unique man far easier to see. Material leaped at me—I handled it as well as I could."

Maugham has repeatedly expressed his idea about an "exotic narrative" and frequently explained that its setting is not chosen because it is picturesque but rather because "the incidents depend on the impact of a foreign environment, Eastern, African or Polynesian and on the white man temporarily exposed to it. Writers have liked it because it gave them the opportunity to delineate characters whose singularities had had free scope to develop as they could never have done in the great centres of civilisation." In his lecture on the Short Story, given before the *Royal Society of Literature*, Maugham acknowledges the importance of Rudyard Kipling:

"In his discovery of the exotic story Kipling opened a new and fruitful field to writers. This is the story the scene of which is set in some country little known to the majority

of readers. It deals with the reactions upon the white man of his sojourn in an alien land and the effect which contact with peoples of another race has upon him."

Never again did Maugham succeed in creating such brilliant "exotic stories" as in the years following World War I, when the memories of his experiences in the Far East were still fresh in his mind. In the motto to the first collection, *The Trembling of a Leaf*, the author epitomises the basic idea underlying these stories. In life, according to the well-known words of Sainte-Beuve, happiness and misery are separated by so small a division or so slight an event that this may well be compared to the trembling of a leaf. Thus the heroes of these stories are those weak and unsettled natures who are equally subject to undivided joy and to boundless, extreme despair. In the preface to *The Casuarina Tree*, Maugham compares this tree, which protects the land from the fury of the winds, with "the planters and administrators who, with all their shortcomings, have after all brought to the people among whom they dwell, tranquillity, justice and welfare." One day, however, the author feels, they will become superfluous and, once they have accomplished their mission, will return home.

Meeting these people who are exposed to the manifold dangers of the enervating atmosphere of the tropics and whose vitality impresses Maugham so much, becomes for him an experience similar to his encounter, thirty years before, with the patients in St. Thomas's Hospital in London and later, at the end of the first World War, in the sanatorium in Scotland. Amidst great suffering and the depressing vicinity of death, man reveals himself without restraint and the self-discipline to which he is normally subjected. Maugham now fills his *Notebooks* with descriptions of men, races and social layers: the European who takes a native or half-caste woman into his house and who, in his way of life, eventually succumbs to the darker race ("The Pool"); the upstart who conflicts with the gentleman ("The Outstation"); the half-caste who belongs to both races and, in reality, is accepted by none of them ("The Yellow Streak"); and, finally, the white woman who, certain of her husband's erotic relations with a

native woman, collapses and returns to England ("The Force of Circumstance").

Endless journeys on steamships, exotic meals in isolated bungalows and troublesome inspection trips into the interior of the islands form the setting in which the passionate actions of his characters take place. For Maugham the East becomes more and more a liberation, just as in his youth the loss of his religious belief and the awareness of the meaninglessness of life had given him freedom. In his story "The Pool," the author has one of his characters remark what he himself may sometimes have felt in the Far East: "It was a more natural life than any he had known; it was nearer to the friendly, fertile earth; civilisation repelled him . . . and by mere contact with these creatures of a more primitive nature he felt a greater freedom." Yet, before Maugham gains this inner freedom in later years, the result of numerous long travels to the East, he is filled by a constant restlessness.

"It gave him no peace. It urged him hither and thither. He was eternally a pilgrim, haunted by a divine nostalgia, and the demon within him was ruthless. There are men whose desire for truth is so great that to attain it they will shatter the very foundations of their world. Of such was Strickland, only beauty with him took the place of truth. I could only feel for him a profound compassion."

And as was the case with Strickland, Maugham himself did not settle down until late in his life.

"I am attached to England, but I have never felt myself very much at home there. I have always been shy with English people. To me England has been a country where I had obligations that I did not want to fulfil and responsibilities that irked me. I have never felt entirely myself till I had put at least the Channel between my native country and me."

Of all the countries where he has resided, he feels most at home in France, the country of his birth. And yet we would be mistaken if we did not realise how strongly he is indebted to English culture and English tradition. Thus, in his exotic work, he is most of all concerned with the English living in the East. As a rule, he deals only with them in his stories, seldom with Americans or Frenchmen, and never, except as minor characters, with natives.

In answer to my inquiry for information about his sojourns in the Far East, Maugham replied as follows:

"It is very difficult for me to give you the information you seek because I never kept a diary of my journeys, and so my dates are very vague. The following is the best I can do. I spent the winter of 1916-1917 in Oceania and visited the Hawaiian Islands, the Samoan Group and Tahiti. I was there altogether about six months. In 1920 I went to China and spent several months there. The results were my book *On a Chinese Screen*, my novel *The Painted Veil*, and a play called *East of Suez*. In 1921 I think I went to the Federated Malay States, Indo-China and again to China. I believe it was in the year 1922 or 1923 that I went to Australia and visited a number of islands in the Malay Archipelago. It was on that journey that I spent three months in Java. I think it must have been the following year that I went to the Malay States and Borneo, and took a journey through the Shan States ending up with Siam, from where I went to Angkor. I do not quite know what year that brings me up to but the year after that I think I must have gone to the West Indies and to various Central and South American States. After that I made no more long journeys until 1937, when I went to India for the winter. On all my journeys I spent about five or six months because I found that I could not absorb after that period. I am reminded in writing this that I spent a winter in California before I went to Australia. On that occasion I was away from Europe for fifteen months."

When Maugham first visited Polynesia, he was already in his forties. A new period of life had begun for him, in which he had reached a certain maturity and yet felt enough vitality to absorb all the new impressions: "I journeyed over a dozen seas, in liners, in tramps, in schooners; I went by train, by car, by chair, on foot or on horseback. I kept my eyes open for character, oddness and personality . . . My interest has been in men and the lives they led."

How much self-criticism the author possesses becomes obvious from his decision to discontinue his travels to the Far East when he began to see types instead of strongly individualised characters:

"I used to stay away till my receptivity was exhausted and I found that when I met people I had no longer the power

to make the imaginative effort to give them shape and coherence; then I returned to England to sort out my impressions and rest till I felt my powers of assimilation restored . . . At last, after seven, I think, of these long journeys, I found a certain sameness in people. I met more and more often types that I had met before. They ceased to interest me so much. I concluded that I had come to the end of my capacity for seeing with passion and individuality the people that I went so far to find, for I had never doubted that it was I who gave them the idiosyncrasy that I discovered in them, and so I decided that there was no further profit for me in travel. I was glad to resume a more ordered way of life."

When he felt that he was no longer capable of new development, he retired to the south of France and bought a villa in order to lead a more secluded life. He noticed that his travels to the East had exercised a direct influence on his character: "I came back from each of my journeys a little different . . . I travelled because it amused me, and to get material that would be of use to me; it never occurred to me that my new experiences were having an effect on me, and it was not till long afterwards that I saw how they had formed my character."

In *The Summing Up* . . . Maugham has written: "My mood was complete acceptance. I asked from nobody more than he could give me. I had learned toleration. I was pleased with the goodness of my fellows; I was not distressed by their badness."

What his experiences in the Far East have taught him he has expressed in *The Gentleman in the Parlour*. One of his characters, the adventurer and beachcomber Capt. Nichols, sums up Maugham's own conclusions. When asked, "You must have known an awful lot of people, what opinion have you formed of the human race?", Capt. Nichols replies:

"I think they're bully. You'd be surprised at the kindness I've received from everybody . . . White, yellow or brown, they're all the same. It's surprisin' what they'll do for you. But they're stupid, they're terribly stupid. They've got no more brain than a turnip . . . I'll give you my opinion of the human race in a nutshell, brother: their heart's in the right place, but their head's a thoroughly inefficient organ."



## THE PRESENTATION OF EUROPEANS

Up to the time of his first visit to the Far East, Maugham had primarily drawn on his own experiences for material: the life in an English public school, at the old University of Heidelberg in Germany, among the artists of Paris, and in the slums of Lambeth. From his first trip to Polynesia, however, in 1916-17, the new types whom he meets on his travels attract his attention and are portrayed by him: British government officials and administrators in the colonies, missionaries and farmers, doctors and businessmen, adventurers and sailors. He is particularly interested in the effect of lonely regions and the native population upon the Europeans, especially the English. Although Maugham has always tried to remain the detached, neutral observer, his own opinions, his likes and dislikes, occasionally enter into his descriptions. "All his South Sea Island impressions," writes Dorothea Lawrence Mann, "all his Chinese impressions are there for the purpose of finding their bearing on the one big question of what the East means in its effect on other Englishmen." Somerset Maugham is the cultured English traveller who, wherever he goes, is interested in the study of human nature without any restriction as to nationality. Most of all, however, he is concerned with the English character with which he mostly deals in his exotic narratives; not, however, because he considers it more interesting than that of other nationalities. He is convinced that, as an Englishman, he will never quite succeed in understanding and portraying other peoples realistically. Maugham has repeatedly stressed this belief, and in the beginning of *The Razor's Edge* he has explained why, in a few instances (e.g. "Red," "The Fall of Edward Barnard" and the last-mentioned novel) he chose others than Englishmen as his main characters. If natives appear at all in his writings, it is only as minor characters. Their importance in Maugham's stories lies almost exclusively in their relationship with the Europeans on whom they often exercise a strong influence. Never does Maugham himself want to be identified with the characters of his stories: they are to appear to the reader objectively in the light of a hard reality.

At first a few general remarks must be made about English society in the Far East and the strong power of convention which

has such a decisive bearing upon the behaviour and the fate of the individual. This society undoubtedly represents some sort of "micro-England," far removed from Britain. Most English colonials try by all means to maintain their customs, and even in exotic regions they live, with few exceptions, in the same style as at home in England. What distinguishes this society from that on the British Isles are characteristics typical of any colony: numerically, the white represent a small minority compared with the native population. Occasionally there are no white women at all in those lonely outposts amidst the dangers of the tropical jungle. In the majority of Maugham's stories such places have been chosen for the setting in which white women live and where they take an essential part in the social life. But instead of establishing some sort of relationship of mutual respect, as long as social intercourse is out of the question, these English women in Maugham's works purposely exclude themselves from all foreign influences and live, as far as possible, the same life as at home. The author shows how, on the one side, the exclusive English society negates the exotic world of the East by which it is surrounded, but nevertheless, cannot help reacting upon it (e.g. "The Taipan").

Many Englishwomen surpass their husbands in arrogance and lack of understanding of the natives and stress their own superiority and social prestige. In "The Door of Opportunity" one of the characters speaks in a derogatory way of the wives of English government officials and planters in the Far East: "And the women . . . were obsessed by petty rivalries. They made a circle that was more provincial than any in the smallest town in England. They were prudish and spiteful." A similar opinion is expressed in "Neil MacAdam" where Darya Munro, a born Russian, has nothing but disdain for them: "They are jealous and spiteful and lazy. They can talk of nothing. If you introduce an intellectual subject they look down their noses as though you were indecent. What can they talk about? They're interested in nothing. If you speak of the body they think you improper, and if you speak of the soul they think you priggish." But her English husband Angus thinks this opinion too one-sided and exaggerated: in his opinion the little colony on Borneo is the

same as any other in the East, "neither very clever, nor very stupid, but amiable and kindly. And that's a good deal."

Most English women in these stories resent and avoid those white men who mix with natives or half-caste girls (e.g. "The Pool"), because of their conviction that it is an inexorable law for every Briton not to transgress the colour-bar. However, temporary relations between white men and Eurasians or natives are far less frowned upon by Englishwomen in the colonies, presumably because in these cases the men are not permanently lost to them. Many Englishmen live before their marriage with Chinese or Malay women; when they marry, they hand their former mistresses a farewell gift and send their half-caste children to the "Eurasian School" in Shanghai (*On a Chinese Screen*).

All these Europeans, who are separated from civilisation and live a life of hardship and deprivation in the lonely regions of the East, appreciate the few visible ties which bind them to their old homes. Thus, the Swedish planter on Samoa in "Red" is fond of his books and magazines, his music and his piano; and the Resident in "The Outstation" reads even in the jungle of Borneo *The London Times* and *The Observer*. "Like his habit of dressing for dinner it was a tie to civilisation." For others, again, like the English customs inspector in the sketch "The Flannings," who live in a small Chinese town, the gramophone "was their only tie with the home they loved: it made them feel not quite so utterly cut off from civilisation."

In many of these stories which have their setting in the Far East Maugham stresses the importance of clubs as the centre of English society, and it was here that the author himself met many of the people who later served him as models for his characters.

Maugham has always been interested in the variety of reasons which prompted these Englishmen to leave their homeland. In some instances (e.g. "The Book Bag," "The Letter," and "Footprints in the Jungle") they went out to the East as planters, usually in order to save enough to enable them to live a carefree and pleasant life in England when the time came for them to retire.

The majority of those who have gone out as colonial officials will also return home when their term of service is over. Some of

these, it is true, feel so much at home in the East (e.g. Warburton in "The Outstation") that they would like to spend the rest of their days there. Most of them, however, are waiting anxiously for the day when they can retire and go back to their old home. A typical representative of this group is Masterson (*The Gentleman in the Parlour*), whom the narrator meets in Keng Tung:

"I don't want to be buried out here. I want to be buried in an English churchyard. I'm happy enough here, but I don't want to live here always. I want England . . . I know I shall be out of it, we fellows who've spent our lives out here always are, but I can potter about the local club and talk to retired Anglo-Indians . . . I dare say it all sounds very humdrum and provincial and dull to you . . . It's a dream, if you like it, but it's all I have, it means everything in the world to me, and I can't give it up."

There are others who left for reasons of health. Thus, Neilson has left his native Sweden because of a lung ailment. The doctors had given him only another year to live, but a quarter of a century has since passed:

"I wanted to enjoy all the loveliness of the world in the short time allotted to me before I passed into the darkness. I thought it was the most beautiful spot I had ever seen . . . I didn't want to die. And somehow it seemed to me that the very beauty of this place made it easier for me to accept my fate. I felt when I came here that all my past life had fallen away, Stockholm and its University, and then Bonn: it all seemed the life of somebody else, as though now at last I had achieved the reality which our doctors of philosophy—I am one myself, you know—had discussed so much. 'A year,' I cried to myself. 'I have a year. I will spend it here and then I am content to die.'"

Then there are those Englishwomen whose primary purpose is to marry. When they realise that their chances of marriage at home are over, they are ready to marry a man from the colonies on furlough in England. It is small wonder that such unions, in which love has played no real part, usually end in separation or misery ("Before the Party"). Some time after Millicent's arrival on Borneo, she learned the reason why Harold had been home on leave: "He came to England that time in order to marry. He didn't much mind who it was . . . He was a confirmed drunkard. He used to go to bed every night with a bottle of whisky and

empty it before morning." His superiors had given him the alternatives of marrying, giving up drink or quitting his job. He had preferred the former, and his wife had temporarily succeeded in curing him of his drunkenness. But finally she realised that all her patience and efforts had been in vain, and in a fit of blind fury she stabbed him to death. "Millicent, you didn't do it?", asks her amazed mother. "I don't know who else did," she replies contemptuously.

Another marriage contracted out of despair, which ends no less unhappily, is that of Kitty and Walter Fane (*The Painted Veil*). She is not filled with any true love for her husband, an English bacteriologist in China whom she marries during his leave in England. Even during her marriage she remains the frivolous, sensuous, superficial girl she had been before. Her transformation does not begin until the outbreak of a cholera epidemic in the heart of China when she is expecting a child. After the death of her husband, Kitty is determined to begin a new life:

"I have hope and courage. The past is finished; let the dead bury their dead. It's all uncertain, life and whatever is to come to me, but I enter upon it with a light and buoyant heart. There's so much I want to know: I want to read and I want to learn. I see in front of me the glorious fun of the world, people and music and dancing, and I see its beauty, the sea and the palm-trees, the sunrise and the sunset and the starry night.

It's all confused, but vaguely I discern a pattern, and I see before me an inexhaustible richness, the mystery and the strangeness of everything. Compassion and charity, the Way and the Wayfarer, and perhaps in the end—God."

Other marriages arranged for purely practical considerations are described in "The Back of Beyond" and "The Force of Circumstance." Here, again, no genuine love exists between the two partners: when Doris learns of her husband's pre-marital relationship with a native woman, she leaves him and returns home.

Another group consists of those Englishmen who, like Warburton, have left their country for economic reasons. Others have exchanged England for the Far East in order to put a stop to their past life. Of such is the beachcomber and adventurer in

*The Narrow Corner*, of whom the narrator says: "I do not know why Captain Nichols first left England . . . He hinted at undeserved misfortune, and there is no doubt that he looked upon himself as the victim of injustice." Also Arnold Jackson ("The Fall of Edward Barnard") who came from a wealthy American family belongs to these immigrants. He had been sentenced to a Chicago jail for embezzlement and, after his release, left his country full of hatred and settled down on a plantation on Tahiti.

Among these characters we also meet Dr. Saunders (*The Narrow Corner*), the experienced physician and *raisonneur*, who so often appears to express Maugham's own ideas. Although we are not exactly told why he was forced to leave England, we are given to understand that something must have caused his name to be removed from the official register. But for a long time he has been happy in his exile, and to a person who is himself in trouble, he gives this advice:

"Shall I tell you something?"

"Not if you don't want to."

"Oh, not about myself. I don't talk much about myself. I think there's no harm in a doctor being a trifle mysterious. It adds to his patients' belief in him. I was going to give you a reflection based on experience. [When some incident has shattered the career you've mapped out for yourself, a folly, a crime, or a misfortune, you mustn't think you are down and out. It may be a stroke of luck, and when you look back years later you may say to yourself that you wouldn't for anything in the world exchange the new life disaster has forced upon you for the dull, humdrum existence you would have led if circumstances hadn't intervened.]"

In a sketch entitled "The Stranger" (*On a Chinese Screen*), we meet the doctor again, surrounded, as before, by a veil of the mysterious:

"He was a doctor who lived in the heart of the city among the Chinese. He was not on the register and no one knew how he had happened to come to the East and eventually settle on the China coast. But it was evident that he was a very clever doctor and the Chinese had great faith in him."

Many of these British characters in Maugham's stories consider their stay in the East as an exile imposed upon them and long

to return to their old home. Such a character is Gallagher ("P. & O."), a farmer in the Federated Malay States. He had achieved a position of wealth and respect and wanted nothing more than to return to Ireland: "I was glad to get out," he says on his way home. "I was fed up. I never want to see the country again or anyone in it."

There are others, however, who no longer feel at home in England when they are on leave. For years they may have planned their visit, full of hopes and expectations, but once they are back in London, they long to return to their outstation on the edge of the jungle: "They did feel a bit out of it, and when you came down to brass tacks the life people led in England was deadly. It was grand fun to come home, but you couldn't live there any more, and sometimes you thought of your bungalow overlooking the river and your tours of the district and what a lark it was to run over once in a blue moon to Sandakan or Kuching or Singapore." ("Virtue").

Finally, Maugham describes those Englishmen whose longing for the East is based on their belief that only there they can find peace and a real home. Such a character is Frith, the scholar from Cambridge (*The Narrow Corner*), who lives on a South Sea island as a planter, "the dreamy, unpractical schoolmaster, lured by the mirage of the East." Charles Strickland (*The Moon and Sixpence*), too is one of them. When he first saw Tahiti, he cried enthusiastically:

"I knew right away that there was the place I'd been looking for all my life. Then we came near, and I seemed to recognise it. Sometimes when I walk about it all seems familiar. I could swear I've lived here before."

He himself had experienced the feeling of nostalgia for a country that was not his own but in which he would find peace and happiness:

"I have an idea that some men are born out of their due place. Accident has cast them amid certain surroundings, but they have always a nostalgia for a home they know not. They are strangers in their birthplace . . . They may spend their whole lives aliens among their kindred and remain aloof among the only scenes they have ever known. Perhaps it is this sense of strangeness that sends men far and wide in the

search for something permanent, to which they may attach themselves. Perhaps some deep-rooted atavism urges the wanderer back to lands which his ancestors left in the dim beginnings of history. Sometimes a man hits upon a place to which he mysteriously feels he belongs. Here is the home he sought, and he will settle amid scenes that he has never seen before, among men he has never known, as though they were familiar to him from his birth. Here at last he finds rest."

A similar character is Abraham (in the same novel), whom the narrator had known at St. Thomas's Hospital and happened to meet again in Alexandria. As a ship's doctor he had been on a trip around the world, when he suddenly decided to stay in Egypt for good. When another fellow-student blames his lack of character for his failure to return to his well-settled career in England, the narrator remarks: "I wondered if Abraham really had made a hash of life. Is to do what you most want, to live under the conditions that please you, in peace with yourself, to make a hash of life? . . . I suppose it depends on what meaning you attach to life, the claim which you acknowledge to society, and the claim of the individual."

This, then, is the picture drawn by Maugham of the English colonials, and such is their behaviour if we may trust his presentation. As regards the author's choice of his heroes, it seems characteristic of him that he should have preferred to portray those persons who, according to conventional Western standards, appear as morally suspect. This, however, may have to do with Maugham's general attitude toward moral questions, and also with the fact that he has shown only certain unusual aspects of the colonials, aspects which, as Bruce Lockhart once observed, are in no way a true reflection of British life in Malaya as a whole.

In Maugham's Far Eastern stories two groups deserve our special attention: colonial officials and missionaries. Not only are they the most numerous but also the most interesting characters. These officials are presented not only as individuals but, at the same time, as representatives who are responsible to their government. The English national character is emphasised in the portrayal of these "Empire-builders": the clinging to their native customs and manners, and the strict separation between



their official and private life which, as far as possible, is spent in an English atmosphere.

Thus the Resident Warburton on Borneo who is the only white man in his district cannot forget his former life among the English aristocracy, and even in the jungle he maintains his habits as a perfect English gentleman. His long isolation has only made his idiosyncracies appear more marked. A gentleman he remained even after he had lost his fortune through gambling:

"He was too much imbued with the spirit of his class to hesitate in the choice of his next step. When a man in his set had run through his money, he went out to the colonies. No one heard Mr. Warburton repine. He made no complaint because a noble friend had advised a disastrous speculation, he pressed nobody to whom he had lent money to repay it, he paid his debts . . . sought help from no one, and, never having done a stroke of work in his life, looked for a means of livelihood. He remained cheerful, unconcerned and full of humour. He had no wish to make any one with whom he happened to be uncomfortable by the recital of his misfortune. Mr. Warburton was a snob, but he was also a gentleman."

While Maugham has respect for the ideal of the gentleman, he ridicules with bitter satire the ability, so important for the success of colonial officials, "to get along pleasantly with others." This opinion is clearly expressed by Waddington who represents more or less the author's own ideas. He tells Kitty his frank opinion of the Assistant Colonial Secretary in Hongkong, Charles Townsend, who is very keen on his career:

"As long as Charlie Townsend's got his wife to depend on he's pretty safe never to do a foolish thing, and that's the first thing necessary for men to get on in Government service. They don't want clever men; clever men have ideas, and ideas cause trouble; they want men who have charm and tact and who can be counted on never to make a blunder. Oh yes, Charlie Townsend will get to the top of the tree all right."

A typical administrator on a South Sea island appears in *A Writer's Notebook*, and again the picture painted by Maugham of the representative of this class is everything but flattering.

"He regards the natives as wilful children, unreasonable

and only just human, who must be treated without any nonsense, but not unkindly. He boasts that he keeps his island like a new pin . . . He looks forward to the time when he can retire and live in the dull London street which you feel he regards as his only real home. He is incredibly conceited."

This arrogance appears again in the government official described in "Her Britannic Majesty's Representative:" "He had cultivated the official manner to perfection. You were the public, an unavoidable nuisance, and the only justification for your existence was that you did what you were told without argument or delay." And yet, the author cannot but admire his courage when, in spite of the danger of being shot himself, he saves three Chinese prisoners from execution: "They are strange people, the British," the narrator concludes. "If their manners were as good as their courage is great they would merit the opinion they have of themselves." Maugham expresses the same respect for Warburton, whose courage he explains as a result of his vanity.

Because so many of these colonial officials live in areas where they form a tiny minority, their national characteristics sometimes appear so strikingly that they become a mere caricature of themselves.

Although the author presents both the good and the bad traits of these officials, the latter seem to be far more numerous. Nothing escapes his sharp eye, and every weakness of the ruling class is mercilessly observed:

"And through that press of people passes the white man who rules them. He is never part of the life about him. So long as the Chinese keep the peace and pay their taxes he does not interfere with them. He is a pale stranger who moves through all this reality like a being from another planet. He is no more than a policeman. He is the eternal exile. He has no interest in the place. He is only waiting for his pension, and he knows that when he gets it he will be unfit to live anywhere but here. In the club they often discuss where they shall live when they retire. They are bored with themselves, bored with one another. They look forward to their freedom from bondage and yet the future fills them with dismay." (*A Writer's Notebook*).

Apart from the official class, Maugham has also been a keen observer of the missionaries. Although both Catholics and

Protestants appear in his narratives, he never discusses the relative values of these religions. In presenting their representatives, he always tries to maintain his strictly neutral attitude. Apparently the individual members of the Catholic faith whom the author has met in the East belonged to a better stock than the Protestants. Maugham admires character wherever he meets it, and among the Catholic missionaries he found examples of courage, sacrifice and deep religious faith.

In the sketch "God's Truth" (*On a Chinese Screen*), a Protestant missionary is shown, whose lack of sympathy for his fellow-men appears in marked contrast to the Christian Gospel he preaches. The primitive, exotic atmosphere in the heart of China shows how human weaknesses can be intensified under the influence of the Eastern environment. In *A Writer's Notebook* Maugham recounts another experience with Protestant missionaries. A French admiral came to one of the South Sea Islands, and the native queen honoured him by a luncheon, suggesting that he sat at her right, "but the missionary's wife insisted that he should sit on *her* right. As the wife of Christ's representative she ranked higher than the queen. The missionary agreed with her. When the natives protested they both flew into a rage; they threatened to get even with them if such a slight were put upon them, and the natives, frightened, at length yielded. The missionaries had their way."

In the story "Fear," Mr. Wingrove, the missionary, is the first victim of his own religious teaching. His lack of inner peace manifests itself even in his outward appearance, for "he had just that look of anxiety which you see in certain forms of heart disease." Wingrove's attitude toward the Chinese is a mixture of distrust and repulsion, tempered by optimism. Although the natives do not believe any longer in their old gods, they remain, in his opinion, "a lying people, untrustworthy, cruel, and dirty . . . Notwithstanding all he said he hated the Chinese with a hatred beside which his wife's distaste was insignificant. When he walked through the teeming streets of the city it was an agony to him, his missionary life revolted him, his soul was like the raw shoulders of the coolies and the carrying pole burnt the bleeding wound." And yet, he would not go back to England and see again

everything he had once so passionately loved. "He martyred his tortured soul with a passionate exasperation." The author believes he has always been a religious man, but perhaps some early belief in a jealous God who hated his creatures to be happy on earth, rankled in the depth of his heart:

"I think because he was so well satisfied with his life he began to think it was sinful. A restless anxiety seized him. Whatever he thought with his intelligence his instincts began to tremble with the dread of eternal punishment."

Only once in these stories is Maugham's treatment of the missionaries a humorous one, free from any sarcasm. Rev. Jones and his unmarried sister live as medical missionaries on Baru, one of the Alas Isles ("The Vessel of Wrath"). To the Dutch administrator of the island, they appear as courageous and a blessing for the sick, but "he thought the customs of the country suited its inhabitants and he had no patience with the missionary's energetic efforts to destroy a way of life that for centuries had worked very well." In this story, Miss Jones who resists the advances of a drunkard but finally marries him, serves as the butt of the author's irony.

In contrast to Rev. Jones, the missionary in "The Seventh-Day Adventist" has chosen his profession for purely economic reasons and has no interest in the Chinese or his surroundings: "He was frankly bored. He took no interest in the religions which flourished in the land he had come to evangelise. He classed them all contemptuously as devilish worship . . . "

It is not often that the author paints a favourable picture of a Protestant missionary. Among the exceptions is Watson (*The Painted Veil*), of whom Waddington and even the French nuns speak only in terms of highest admiration. His love belongs to all people without distinction, "Christians, Buddhists or Confucians, they were just human beings." In "The Servants of God," Maugham introduces English and French Protestant missionaries who represent the same pleasant type and who have two characteristics in common, "goodness and humility." The Englishman, a former officer, was suddenly overcome by a sudden feeling "that he must give up his life to bringing the heathen to the belief of

Christ . . . it was a feeling that he could not resist; it gave him no peace. He was a happy man now, enjoying his work."

In "Honolulu," the author deals with the descendents of missionaries, many of whom have become quite wealthy. One of the characters asks the narrator:

"Do you know your Bible?"

"Fairly," I answered.

"There is a text which says: The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. I guess it runs differently in Honolulu. The fathers brought Christianity to the Kanaka and the children jumped his land."

The native kings gave the missionaries land as a mark of esteem, and soon they developed this into profitable commercial enterprise. In "P. & O.," "Dr. Macalister" (*On a Chinese Screen*) and *The Painted Veil*, Maugham makes it very clear that many of these Protestant missionaries are disappointed if they are denied the comfortable life of modern conveniences.

The opposite is true of the Catholics in Maugham's stories. Thus, the Italian Catholic missionary in *The Gentleman in the Parlour* had always desired to come to the East where he leads a life of hardship and deprivation in the jungle of Indo-China. He is a tolerant man and admits that "Buddhism is a beautiful religion." His only hope is to win influence over the inhabitants of the jungle villages who are ghost worshippers. Maugham tries to imagine his feelings toward his last hour and whether or not he will then realize that he has wasted his life for a false ideal. "Of course," he admits, "he had a vocation. His faith was robust, and it was as natural to him to believe as to us to breathe. He was no saint to work miracles and no mystic to endure the pain and the ineffable pleasure of union with the Godhead, but as it were the common labourer of God."

Another case of the unselfishness of the Catholics is that of the French nuns in *The Painted Veil* who, during a cholera epidemic, seem totally unaware of the dangers surrounding them day and night. Even a cynic and *raisonneur* such as Waddington cannot but respect their courage. Kitty remarks that they are not like the Protestant missionaries who have a year's leave every now and then; when they take off for the East, they leave France for

good. And after the death of her doctor husband, she tells Waddington more about them. During the weeks of her work in the hospital she has come to know and respect them a great deal:

"They're wonderful, those nuns, they make me feel utterly worthless. They give up everything, their home, their country, love, children, freedom; and all the little things which I sometimes think must be harder still to give up, flowers and green fields, going for a walk on an autumn day, books and music, comfort, everything they give up, everything. And they do it so that they may devote themselves to a life of sacrifice and poverty, obedience, killing work and prayer. To all of them the world is really and truly a place of exile. Life is a cross which they willingly bear, but in their hearts all the time is a desire—oh, it's so much stronger than desire, it's a longing, an eager, passionate longing for the death which shall lead them to life everlasting."

Never will Kitty forget the farewell words of the Mother Superior: "Remember that it is nothing to do your duty, that is demanded of you and is no more meritorious than to wash your hands when they are dirty; the only thing that counts is the love of duty; when love and duty are one, then grace is in you and you will enjoy a happiness which passes all understanding."

In one of his sketches about life in China, "The Stranger," Maugham has stressed what appeared to him as a major difference between Catholic and Protestant missionaries. During the hot season a Protestant missionary in China meets Dr. Saunders. The latter tells him of a mysterious stranger who recently had asked in vain to see the missionary or his assistants but was told that no one was at the mission between March and September. All the white missionaries were away on vacation in a more favourable climate. Finally the doctor had recommended to him the Catholic missionaries who, in contrast to the Protestants, would never entrust their patients to the care of the natives. In the end Dr. Saunders asked the stranger for his name. "Oh, I am Christ," he said, on leaving. When the Protestant hears of the visitor, he feels the comparison with his Catholic colleagues unjustified:

"They were unmarried. They had no families to think of. The mortality among them was terrifying. Why, in the vast city, of fourteen nuns who had come out to China ten years ago all but three were dead . . . They had no ties. They had

no duties to those who were near and dear to them. Oh, it was grossly unjust to drag in the Roman Catholics."

As we see, Maugham is far from idealising but he is also free from prejudices. Even in his presentation of the Protestant missionaries he remains the neutral observer. But as early as 1901, Maugham, the agnostic, was sceptical of the idea of missionary work, as can be seen from an entry in *A Writer's Notebook*:

"If the use of religion is to make man moral . . . it seems to follow that man can't do better than to accept the religion of the country they happen to have been born in. Why then should missionaries go to India and China to convert people who have already a religion that performs very adequately the chief function of religion? Probably few Hindus in India, few Buddhists in China are as moral as Hinduism and Buddhism would have them to be, but that is no reason why they should not be left alone: we all know that few Christians act up to the principles of Christianity . . . or is it that the missionaries think that God will condemn to endless torment all who do not share their particular beliefs? No wonder they think they're cursing and swearing when you say, 'Good God.'"

Richard A. Cordell rightly remarks that Maugham "always expresses respect and sometimes even awe for the religions of the East, and admiration for the Catholic missionaries."

To complete this picture of European characters in Maugham's Far Eastern stories let us look briefly at the English farmers and planters, most of whom lead a lonely life in the East. They go back occasionally on leave and, in almost all cases, look forward to settling down in England as soon as they can afford to retire. The farmers mostly belong to two major groups: the majority are people of the lower middle classes, whereas a small minority only has been better educated and attended a public school or university. Like Tim Hardy ("The Book Bag") they went out to the East because in England they had no way of earning a reasonable living, "and rubber planting is apparently the only occupation at which a man can earn a salary without training or experience." Maugham believes that all of these farmers share the same attitude toward the representatives of the British Government, "a combination of awe, envy, contempt and petulance. They sneer at them behind their backs, but look upon

a garden party or a dinner at the Resident's house as an event in their lives. You would have to go far to find among the planters a man of culture, reading or distinction." Obviously the author does not count among them such men who, in their hearts, are artists or scholars (Neilson in "Red," Frith in *The Narrow Corner*).

A last group, it seems, is made up of degenerated Englishmen in the East like Ginger Ted ("The Vessel of Wrath") or beach-combers such as Captain Nichols (*The Narrow Corner*). The author has enjoyed their company and always felt richly rewarded for the small inconveniences they caused him: "They are easy of approach and affable in conversation. They seldom put on airs, and the offer of a drink is a sure way to their hearts . . . They look upon conversation as the great pleasure of their life . . . and for the most part they are entertaining talkers." As we see Maugham's interest in the Europeans in the Far East is not restricted to cultured people. Also among the lower classes he meets people who fascinate him and whom he describes in his stories. The Irish sailor in "Sullivan," for example, has lived in China for years as a vagabond and fooled the authorities by telling them a fantastic story of a robbery whose victim he has become, until one day he received, instead of money, a severe beating. This treatment had a healthy effect upon him, and henceforth he led a decent life as a policeman, married to a Chinese woman. Over a glass of whisky he tells the narrator his story. "But the beating is what he cannot get over. It surprises him yet and he cannot, he simply cannot understand it. He has no ill-feelings towards the magistrate who ordered it; on the contrary it appeals to his sense of humour."

Finally there are a number of characters in Maugham's narratives who, though belonging to various professions, yet form a homogenous group as representatives of the author's own ideas. Among them we find Dr. Saunders (*The Narrow Corner*) and Dr. McPhail ("Rain"), the customs inspector Waddington (*The Painted Veil*) and the colonial official George Moon ("The Back of Beyond"). All of these characters assume the role of the *raisonneur* and remind one of the author himself who, under the pen-name of "Ashenden" appears in the book under that title,



and as Mr. Maugham in *The Razor's Edge*. It was not without good reason that he preferred to use several physicians for this role: they have seen so much human suffering and misery in their profession that, as a result, they have gained a more tolerant attitude toward life. Once a wise Dutch government official, Mynheer Gruyter ("The Vessel of Wrath") appears in the role of the *raisonneur*. "He ruled the people who inhabited the Alas Islands with firmness tempered by a keen sense of the ridiculous." Gruyter is a typical Maugham character, kindly and tolerant. He enjoys life on his remote island and all the advantages and conveniences which come with his position: "It seemed to him a great luxury to waste time. When his young man's fancy turned to thoughts of love, his head boy brought to the house a little dark-skinned bright-eyed creature in a sarong. He thought that change kept the heart young. He enjoyed freedom and was not weighed down by a sense of responsibility." We find a similar philosophy of life in Dr. Saunders: to him, the practice of his medical profession, even life itself, were "but a game that can be played, and it gave him satisfaction to play it well." The narrator stresses, however, that the life he leads was a good one, "for he was charitable and kindly, and he devoted his energies to the alleviation of pain, but if motive counts for righteousness, then he deserved no praises, for he was influenced in his actions neither by love, pity, nor charity." And although he had little sympathy for his fellowmen, he was unusually tolerant: "He thought it no business of his to praise or condemn. He was able to recognise that one was a saint and another a villain but his consideration of both was fraught with the same cool detachment." Like Mynheer Gruyter, Dr. Saunders is no friend of the ascetic way of life but a true hedonist:

"The wise man combines the pleasures of the senses and the pleasures of the spirit in such a way as to increase the satisfaction he gets from both. The most valuable thing I have learnt from life is to regret nothing. Life is short, nature is hostile, and man is ridiculous; but oddly enough most misfortunes have their compensations, and with a certain amount of humour and a good deal of horse-sense one can make a fairly good job of what is after all a matter of very small consequence." (*The Narrow Corner*.)

His realism prevents him from adhering to an idealistic philosophy of life which, it seems to him, easily leads to disillusionment: "That's the worst of being an idealist; you won't accept people as they are. Wasn't it Christ who said, forgive them, for they know not what they do." As a rationalist he believes in nothing but himself and his own experience. The young Australian Fred Blake blames him that he has lost everything in life, hope, faith and awe, and asks the doctor what, if anything, he still possesses. "Resignation," he answered. "I have acquired resignation by the help of an unfailing sense of the ridiculous." His greatest satisfaction, however, lies in the fact that nobody in the world is essential for his peace of mind, that he is absolutely self-sufficient and, without missing anything, can do without the company of others.

Another representative of Maugham's own tolerance is the British Resident George Moon who expresses, among other things, the author's own attitude toward gratitude: "One mustn't expect gratitude. It's a thing that no one has a right to. After all, you do good because it gives you pleasure. It's the purest form of happiness there is. To expect thanks for it is really asking too much. If you get it, well, it's like a bonus on shares on which you've already received a dividend; it's grand, but you mustn't look upon it as your due." Like Maugham himself, George Moon rejects the accusation of being a cynic, a term which he wants to have applied to himself only with great reservations:

"But if to look truth in the face and not resent it when it's unpalatable, and take human nature as you find it, smiling when it's absurd and grieved without exaggeration when it's pitiful, is to be cynical, then I suppose I'm a cynic. Mostly human nature is both absurd and pitiful, but if life has taught you tolerance you find in it more to smile at than to weep."

Leslie A. Marchand has pointed out that Maugham, by nature and long practice egocentric and autobiographical, has never identified his point of view with that of his objective characters in the strange, exotic atmosphere of his Eastern stories. He believes he finds in this technique a clue to the understanding of

a lack or, at least a weakness, in Maugham's portrayal of character:

"His persons are 'cases' whom he analyses in the impersonal laboratory manner. He looks with cynicism and pity at the spectacle of their self-duping. Rarely does he merge his personality in theirs to achieve that complete sympathy which is one of the marks of a great novelist. We are almost inclined to blame his people, even when we know that he doesn't want us to, or at least, to reproach them for attempting to mask the baseness of thoughts and desires under the pretence of respectability and unselfishness."

("The Exoticism of Somerset Maugham").

It seems doubtful, however, whether or not this criticism is justified. Certainly there are characters in Maugham's works—and he has always willingly admitted this—who are so strange to him that he had difficulty in penetrating their mentality and "getting under their skin." But he has always honestly tried to understand the motives of their actions and, except in the case of natives, succeeded in doing so.

"They are all a hotchpotch of greatness and littleness, of virtue and vice, of nobility and baseness. Some have more strength of character or more opportunity, and so in one direction or another give their instincts free play, but potentially they are all the same." (*The Summing Up*.)

## THE INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT.

On his travels to the East, Maugham has taken a special interest in the influence which the tropical climate and the exotic environment often exercises upon the European settlers. Although numerous passages in his writings reveal their impact, the majority of them are indirect, subtle allusions and suggestions. That the dramatic actions of his stories are to be ascribed to a direct influence of these factors can be proven, with any degree of certainty, only in a few cases.

In "The Letter," Maugham speaks of the professional honour of a lawyer, Mr. Joyce, the attorney for Mrs. Crosbie, who is on trial for the shooting of her former lover. He has no scruples about helping her retrieve, through bribery, a compromising letter before it can be used by the jury against the defendant.

Only in this way does Leslie Crosbie succeed in escaping her just punishment for the carefully-planned and executed, cold-blooded murder which, she now claims, was committed in self-defence. This action, of course, cannot be explained by any outside influence but by her character which, only in unguarded moments, is reflected on her countenance. But in the case of the lawyer, it seems, the feeling for right and wrong has been lost in his twenty-year stay in the Federated Malay States: "He had lived in the East a long time and his sense of professional honour was not perhaps so acute as it had been . . . He made up his mind to do something which he knew was unjustifiable." Although such an unscrupulous revenge is possible also under different conditions, Maugham seems to have left no doubt that loneliness and tropical heat have intensified Leslie's passions. The exotic background of an isolated rubber plantation serves only to increase the effect of this grotesque action upon the reader.

Another result of the climate is shown in *On a Chinese Screen*. In Henderson, a Socialist and member of the Fabian Society, we see a gradual weakening of moral feeling. When he first came out to China he was shocked by the sight of the Jinrickshaw which revolted his sense of personal dignity. But after three years he has no more scruples about it, and loses his compassion for the coolies, toiling in stifling heat: "It's good for them. You mustn't pay attention to the Chinese. You see, we are only here because they fear us. We are the ruling race."

Similar problems are raised in "The Fall of Edward Barnard," one of the few stories in which the central characters are American. American civilization has not been able to give Edward a meaning in life. It was only on Tahiti that he found real happiness and learned what was most important for him: "I never knew I had a soul till I found it here." A friend from Chicago, Bateman Hunter, vainly tries to bring him back to America; but when he blames Edward for having lost his moral standards as the result of his stay in the East, the latter defends himself against this accusation:

"No, they remain just as clearly divided in my mind as before, but what has become a little confused in me is the

distinction between the bad man and the good one. Is Arnold Jackson a bad man who does good things or a good man who does bad things? It's a difficult question to answer. Perhaps we make too much of the difference between one man and another. Perhaps even the best of us are sinners and the worst of us are saints. Who knows?"

Edward plans to remain on Tahiti for the rest of his life, he will have books and a home and "the infinite variety of the sea and the sky, the freshness of the dawn and the beauty of the sunset, and the rich magnificence of the night . . . In my small way I too shall have lived in beauty. Do you think it is so little to have enjoyed contentment? We know that it will profit a man little if he gain the whole world and lose his soul. I think I have won mine."

Occasionally Maugham implies that the surroundings may have a decisive influence. Mr. Pete ("The Consul"), for example, is generally considered strange and peculiar, but only as a result of the intensification of his idiosyncracies: "He had lived so much alone that his natural tendency to eccentricity had developed to an extravagant degree, and he had habits which surprised the stranger."

Another example of the excessive development of character traits in remote, isolated areas is that of Waddington (*The Painted Veil*) who "had lived for many years in outposts, often with no man of his own colour to talk to, and his personality had developed in eccentric freedom. He was full of fads and oddities." As an objective observer, Maugham is content with the mere statement of fact. The circumstances which may drive a man to extreme actions are never mentioned explicitly, although expressions such as "eccentric freedom" permit us to conclude that it is the missing corrective of the social environment which must be a strong contributing factor. Richard A. Cordell is certainly right when he asserts that "the exotic life in China often brings out the worst in the colonials—their intolerance, provincialism, pompousness, qualities a narrowly circumscribed life in England might not have uncovered."

Also the Englishman's love for his country is more intense among these self-exiles in Maugham's stories. As one of the

characters in *The Explorer* states quite frankly: "It is only we who live away from England who really love it."

In *The Gentleman in the Parlour* the author mentions a casual acquaintance, a young Englishman, who has spent five years in Keng Tung and prefers it to any other place in the world since it has given him contentment. He, too, is characterised by his long separation from England and his life in China, because "he had the aloofness of manner you often find in those who have lived much alone in unfrequented places."

Then again, there are those Englishmen who, like Groseley in the same book, appear to be completely unaffected by the Eastern environment, "its colour and strangeness, its possibilities of pleasure." But when he actually returned to England, life in London held no more attractions for him, and he realised that he could live nowhere but in the East. "And when he saw the coast of Europe sink into the sea he heaved a great sigh of relief. When they got to Suez and he felt the first touch of the East he knew he had done the right thing. Europa was finished. The East was the only place."

We have already mentioned Maugham's preference for depicting such Englishmen who, on the one hand, do everything to cut themselves off from their exotic environment, and yet cannot help reacting upon it. Such a character is "The Taipan" (*On a Chinese Screen*), a wealthy exile who loves nothing in China but the life of the English colony. He does not plan to go back to England when the time comes for him to retire; he wants rather to take a house near the race-course in Shanghai and spend the rest of his days comfortably with bridge and ponies and golf. During a walk he sees some coolies digging a grave, and he asks them in English for whom it is. "They answered him in Chinese and he cursed them for ignorant fools." The unexpected sight of these coolies destroys all his peace of mind and brings out in him once again his contempt for the Chinese and his surroundings: "He hated the country . . . Why had he ever come? He was panic-stricken now . . . He wanted to go home. If he had to die he wanted to die in England. He could not bear to be buried among all these yellow men, with their slanting eyes and their grinning faces . . . He could never rest there." The same evening

he decides to give up his position and to return to England immediately but next morning he was found on the floor of his room: "He was stone dead." The East, it seems, has taken such strong hold of him that he could not escape it any longer.

Loneliness also seems to account for the white settlers' strong urge to talk of themselves. Another result of life in isolated outposts is the increase of passions which the author has repeatedly observed and shown in his narratives. Thus in "Flotsam and Jetsam," it is the strong mutual dislike of husband and wife on a lonely plantation in the jungle of Borneo; in "The Outstation" the passionate hatred between the Resident Warburton and his new assistant, Cooper; in "Mackintosh" the outspoken enmity between the administrator, Walker, and his colleague, Mackintosh. The extreme intensity of love and sexual passion is shown in "The Letter," "Rain," *The Painted Veil*, *East of Suez*.

Another influence of the world "East of Suez" upon the Europeans becomes apparent in "Footprints in the Jungle": the sudden end of any mental or intellectual growth which the narrator has observed in so many English farmers.

Yet a long stay in the Far East may also have beneficial results for the white settler: thus, a number of Maugham's characters have developed a greater tolerance in the Orient. In several stories Maugham has illustrated his theory that conventional moral standards can easily lead to misfortune (Erik Christessen in *The Narrow Corner*, "Neil MacAdam"). In their exaggerated striving for moral purity both of them are destroyed by their own idealism which stands in marked contrast to the demands of reality. A thoroughly matter-of-fact attitude, on the other hand, is found in a character like Louise Frith (*The Narrow Corner*), who grew up with native children on a South Sea island. In a conversation with Dr. Saunders, she asks: "Don't you think it's rather stupid the importance men, white men at least, attach to the act of flesh?" She knows no inhibitions in sexual matters and with a frank smile answers the doctor's question whether or not she has any fear of consequences: "Oh doctor, I've lived on this island almost all my life. You don't imagine sex has many secrets for Malay children. I've heard everything connected with it talked about since I was seven." Here Maugham underscores the

tolerant and realistic attitude towards life which is typical of some of his characters who have lived in the Far East. A similar tolerance is expressed by Mrs. Tabret (*The Sacred Flame*), who has spent many years in India and, as a result of her long stay there, states: "We all know nowadays that morality isn't the same in all countries. There are many things, for instance, that we think right and they think wrong in India."

That the Orient is even able to form or transform one's character is a fact which Maugham himself has experienced and has frankly admitted. In *The Summing Up* he compares the patients of the sanatorium in Scotland among whom he had lived after the first World War with the Europeans in the Far East who are equally subject to character changes: "In their different ways these people were as singular as any of those I had met in the South Seas: illness and the queer, sheltered life affected them strangely, twisting, strengthening, deteriorating their character just as in Samoa or Tahiti it was deteriorated, strengthened or twisted by the languorous climate and the alien environment."

While most of the examples cited thus far deal primarily with the influence of the Eastern surroundings, there are in Maugham's works a number of statements about the effect of climate which are no less important. The dangers of the demoralizing, harmful climate are frankly admitted by the departing Resident George Moon who has spent a life-time in the East. And of Mrs. Cartwright ("Footprints in the Jungle"), a woman presumably in her fifties, the narrator says that in the East it is difficult to determine one's age because "people age quickly." The same is expressed by the police inspector Gaze: "You haven't lived out East all your life. It ages one before one's time. One's an elderly man at fifty, and at fifty-five one's good for nothing but the scrap heap."

All these Englishmen suffer from the effect of the stifling, murderous heat which, together with their isolation from civilisation, is almost unbearable even for those who, like Guy ("Footprints in the Jungle"), have spent practically all their lives in the East. The climate and the loneliness on one of the outstations seems to be responsible for the alcoholism of Harold ("Before the



Party"), while Lawson ("The Pool") has been weakened by alcohol and the enervating climate of the tropics.

Occasionally these characters frankly admit the reasons for their failure. Thus, Harold Knox (*East of Suez*) remarks to his Chinese servant: "You don't care if I drink myself to death, Wu,—do you? Fault of the climate." In "The Back of Beyond" Tom Seffary considers the tropical climate responsible for the boundless misery of his wife after the unexpected death of a friend: "It made women nervous and high-strung." Only after a while does he realise the real reason for her unhappiness: the love affair which existed between his wife and Knox, who was also married.

In one of his best-known stories, "Rain," it is the endless pouring of the tropical rain which has such an enervating effect upon the characters that one of them, the missionary Rev. Davidson, finally loses control over his feelings. Even Dr. MacPhail felt it was beginning to get on his nerves:

"It was unmerciful and somehow terrible; you felt in it the malignancy of the primitive powers of nature. It did not pour, it flowed. It was like a deluge from heaven . . . It seemed to have a fury of its own. And sometimes you felt that you must scream if it did not stop, and then suddenly you felt powerless, as though your bones had suddenly become soft; and you were miserable and hopeless."

In contrast to the missionary, a religious fanatic, the tolerant, kind doctor understands Miss Sadie Thompson and does not blame her: "I have no doubt the loneliness is getting on her nerves. And the rain—that's enough to make a man jumpy."

In *The Narrow Corner*, the Dutch colonial official, Van Ryk, is not surprised about the suicide of Erik Christessen:

"I'm afraid it's the old story. It's a mistake to live alone in a place like this. They brood. They get home-sick. The heat is killing. And then one day they can't stand it any more, and they just put a bullet through their heads. I've seen it before, more than once. Much better to have a little girl to live with you, and it makes hardly any difference to your expenses . . ."

Like Maugham, Rudyard Kipling has repeatedly stressed the dangers of the East. In "The City of Dreadful Night" he states: "Something borne on men's shoulders comes by in the half-light,

and I stand back. A woman's corpse going down to the burning-ghat, and a bystander says, 'She died at midnight from the heat.' " A similarly sad portrait is painted in his story "The End of the Passage:" "There was neither sky, sun, nor horizon,—nothing but a brown purple haze of heat. It was as though the earth was dying of apoplexy." The murderous climate of India transforms the country for six months every year into hell, and every decent cemetery, he feels, should always have half a dozen graves ready "for contingencies and incidental wear and tear." ("At the Pitt's Mouth").

Although Maugham never wrote to reform or to impart knowledge but "merely" for entertainment, for the sake of telling a story, some scholars have suspected in his stories a warning of the manifold dangers of the East: "Que le faible et le raffiné, que l'intellectuel et le sentimental n'aillent pas aux Iles: le climat, la boisson, l'amour feront de lui une épave!" wrote Paul Dottin (*Somerset Maugham et ses Romans*). This, it seemed to him, was the moral lesson which is to be found in these stories about Polynesia. Although Maugham often shows how weak persons can easily fall victim to the tropical surroundings and the climate of the East, he never fails to present the other aspect also; by no means all European characters succumb to the dangers by which they are constantly surrounded. Thus the wife of Dr. Coutras, the French doctor in *The Moon and Sixpence*, is conspicuous for her remarkable power of resistance towards the dangerous influences of the tropics: "She had not yielded for an instant to the enervating charm of the tropics, but contrariwise was more active, more worldly, more decided than anyone in a temperate clime would have thought it possible to be."

Manly characters are also to be found among the colonial officials, some of whom have enough strength to retain their dignity and not to succumb to the evil influences of their surroundings. Such a man is the Resident Warburton who explains his habits to his colleague Cooper:

"When I lived in London I moved in circles in which it would have been just as eccentric not to dress for dinner every night as not to have a bath every morning. When I came to Borneo I saw no reason to discontinue so good a

habit. For three years, during the war, I never saw a white man. I never omitted to dress on a single occasion on which I was well enough to come in to dinner. You have not been very long in this country; believe me, there is no better way to maintain the proper pride which you should have in yourself. When a white man surrenders in the slightest degree to the influences that surround him he very soon loses his self-respect, and when he loses his self-respect you may be quite sure that the natives will soon cease to respect him."

While "The Fall of Edward Barnard" is an example of the gradual weakening of energy and finally the complete loss of any power of action under the influence of tropical climate and surroundings, the very opposite is shown in "Red." Neilson had come to Samoa suffering from tuberculosis but soon "the open air, the equable temperature, the rest, the simple fare, began to have an unexpected effect on his health . . . and on a sudden he saw the possibility that he might live." For twenty years he remains in the tropics and then summons the energy to leave the East permanently and to return to his native Sweden.

### THE PROBLEM OF MIXED RACES AND THE FATE OF THE HALF-CASTE.

The frequent presentation of Eurasians in Maugham's Far Eastern works suggests his special interest in the problems of mixed marriages. Like Kipling, Maugham shows the prejudice of the English against natives or half-castes, who are usually looked upon as inferiors, pariahs, or who lack the white man's sense of honour. Thus, in moments of danger it is never safe to rely upon a Eurasian, to trust in their help, for "sooner or later they will let you down." ("The Yellow Streak"). In *East of Suez* one of the characters, Harry Knox, despises a friend, Freddy Baker, for marrying a pretty Eurasian girl, but is blamed by a more tolerant Englishman to whom the old prejudices appear out of date: "Why shouldn't a man marry a half-caste if he wants to?" George Conway, however, who has come to know China and the power of convention among the English in the Far East, realises the influence which such a marriage may have upon Baker's social and professional life: "He'll never get a good job with a Eurasian wife . . . He has definite social obligations.

Freddy Baker will be sent to twopenny half-penny outposts where his wife doesn't matter." Knox himself asserts never to have met a cultured and charming Eurasian during his seven-year stay in China: "I've never met one, male or female, that didn't give me the shivers." Nor is he fond of their customs and ways of life: "We don't much like their morals, but we can't stick their manners." Even Harry, the husband of a Eurasian, must admit that "sometimes they're not very tactful. I don't know that I much want one of my clerks to come and slap me on the back in the office and call me old chap." George is convinced that the English have good reasons for despising the half-castes, for in his opinion they have inherited only the bad traits of the two races from which they come. Though he admits possible exceptions, these would only confirm what he has come to accept as the general rule. As a young man he himself had once thought of marrying a Eurasian girl, but the British Embassy in Peking had cabled him that he would have to quit the diplomatic service. His experiences have led him to the conclusion that "a Eurasian can't tell the truth if he tries to . . . You can never rely on him."

That Europeans, particularly the British in the Far East, despise the half-castes, a feeling which Maugham has so often observed, is also illustrated in "The Door of Opportunity." The District Officer in Daktar, an isolated area on Sondurah, for example, is not willing to rescue the native wife of Prynne, an English farmer, who is threatened by Chinese coolies: "I'm not going to risk my life and my policeman's for the sake of a native woman and her half-caste brats."

But it is not only the Europeans who resent the Eurasians; even the Orientals give them to understand that they are not, and never will become, a part of their people. Therefore it is small wonder if those Eurasians who had the advantage of a good European education and who are socially equal to the Europeans, finally come to despise themselves. Even those among them who have attained high positions are presented as unhappy creatures at odds with themselves. A typical case is that of Izzart, an administrator on Borneo ("The Yellow Streak"). Throughout his life he is obsessed by a passionate fear of having his origins discovered as a result of his appearance or his flawless Malay and

Dyak. He, too, belongs to neither of the two races, and though he is only a second degree half-caste, the dark blood in his veins seems to be decisive. Especially striking is the affection he has for his mother, the child of a mixed marriage.

"He felt for her a deep tenderness; it was almost a physical bond between them, something stronger than the ordinary feeling of mother and son, so that notwithstanding the failings that exasperated him she was the only person in the world with whom he felt entirely at home."

The uncertainty whether or not the secret of his race would ever become known to his superiors is more and more enervating for him, and he has no doubt about what would happen if they ever found out. "They would say he was inefficient and careless, as the half-castes were, and when he talked of marrying a white woman they would snigger." He considers it unfair of them that they would look down upon him as an 'outcast' only because of "that drop of native blood in his veins" which destroys all his happiness in life: "Because of it they would always be on the watch for the expected failure at the critical moment." Even in his school days at Harrow he suffered from his origin, when one of his fellow-students referred to him as a "damned half-caste." And many years later, when he was in the service of the Sultan of Sembulu, an English colleague, the Resident of Kula Solor, inquired, "Do Malays ever ask you if you have any native blood in you?" In the end, however, he came to realise that no one had had the least doubt about his origin: "Why should he have those bright eyes and that swarthy skin? Why should he speak Malay with such ease . . . ? Of course they know. What a fool he was ever to think that they believed that story of his about the Spanish grandmother! They must have laughed up their sleeves when he told it, and behind his back they had called him a damned nigger."

On a boat ride on a jungle river in Borneo, Izzart and his companion are overcome by a sudden spring tide and are in danger of being drowned. Later, Izzart is tortured by the thought of his lack of courage when he failed to help his companion, and he asked himself "whether it was on account of that wretched drop of native blood in him that when he heard Campion cry out his nerve failed him." Finally the reason for his egocentric

behaviour becomes clear to him: it was the mixture of races, "the yellow streak," which—according to the author—accounts for his cowardice. Thus, in the last analysis, Maugham deals with the question of freewill and determinism, and leaves little doubt which is responsible for the actions of these Eurasians.

Not only Izzart finally abhors the half-castes to whom he himself belongs, but the same applies to Daisy, the Eurasian girl in *East of Suez*. In a conversation with her English husband she remarks: "You needn't hesitate to say anything against the Eurasians. You can't hate and despise them more than I do." Harry Anderson, a young Englishman, had promised to marry Daisy, and though his experienced friend George Conway warns him not to transgress the colour-bar, Harry does not heed his advice. When the latter first meets Harry's future wife, Daisy, he recognises in her his own former mistress, whom he had deserted on realising that such a marriage would destroy his career. Now the two former lovers meet again and Daisy reproaches him for his behaviour, but George tries as best as possible to justify it:

"I couldn't say good-bye to you, Daisy. They said that if I married you I'd have to leave the service. I was absolutely penniless. They dinned it into my ears that if a white man marries a Eurasian he's done for. I wouldn't listen to them, but in my heart I knew it was true."

Daisy was then sold by her mother to Lee Tai Cheng, a wealthy Chinese who, in spite of his education in Oxford and Harvard, has remained faithful to his Eastern cultural tradition. Ultimately she could not tolerate this existence, runs away and finally marries Harry. Lee, however, is convinced that one day she will come back to him and thus to the race to which, in her heart, she belongs:

"I was the first and I shall be the last . . . You are not a white woman. What power has this blood of your father's when it is mingled with the tumultuous stream which you have inherited through your mother from innumerable generations? Our race is very pure and very strong. Strange nations have overrun us, but in a little while we have absorbed them so that no trace of a foreign people is left in us . . . You can wear European clothes and eat European food, but in your heart you are a China woman. Are your passions the weak and vacillating passions of the white man?"

There is in your heart a simplicity which the white man can never fathom and a deviousness which he can never understand. Your soul is like a rice patch cleared in the middle of the jungle. All round the jungle hovers, watchful and jealous, and it is only by ceaseless labour that you can prevent its inroads. One day your labour will be in vain and the jungle will take back its own. China is closing in on you . . . You're restless and unhappy and dissatisfied because you're struggling against instincts which were implanted in your breast when the white man was a hungry, naked savage. One day you will surrender. You will cast off the white woman like an outworn garment. You will come back to China as a tired child comes back to his mother. And in the immemorial usages of your great race you will find peace."

Even in her marriage with Harry she is still in love with George and wants to return to him as his mistress: "I'll live like a Chinese woman. I'll be your slave and your plaything. I want to get away from all these Europeans. After all, China is the land of my birth and the land of my mother. China is crowding in upon me; I'm sick of these foreign clothes. I have a strange hankering for the ease of the Chinese dress . . . I'll be a little Chinese girl living in the foreigner's house. Have you ever smoked opium?" In his despair George takes his own life, and now Daisy's bond with the white race is entirely broken. She returns to Lee and thus to the Chinese people, just as he had predicted. It seems that the East never releases what it has once taken: "The day has come. The jungle takes back its own." As in the case of Izzart, it is finally the coloured race which, in the struggle for power, has shown its superiority.

We have already noticed the Englishman's feeling of superiority over the natives and half-castes. Although newcomers from England are not quite so outspoken in their resentment, the power of convention is too strong, and after a while they, too, accept the views of their countrymen. Thus, Sylvia, the sister of Harold Knox (*East of Suez*), who has just arrived from England, "had no patience with the airs people gave themselves in the East. A Eurasian was just as good as anybody else." But her brother sharply rejects her attitude in a talk with George Conway: "I shouldn't like it very much, you know, if Daisy knew one or two white women. Would you much care for your sister to be very

pally with a half-caste?" Again Maugham shows what a decisive impact the power of convention may have upon the fate of the individual.

In discussing the bitter lot of an English friend who married a Eurasian, Harold Knox finds that "it can't be very nice to have a wife whom even the missionary ladies turn up their noses at." After his marriage to Daisy, Harry's friends remain faithful to him only because they are themselves unmarried. Inasmuch as the social life of the European settlers in the East is largely dominated by women, half-caste girls, many of them beautiful, are rarely accepted as equals by English society.

When Harry married Daisy, he did not heed the warnings of his friend George, but after having been snubbed by his former female acquaintances, he became convinced that the best thing for them would be a transfer to a smaller place where social conventions were less rigid:

"It's for my sake just as much as for yours that I'd be glad to go elsewhere. Of course everybody at the club knows I'm married. Some of them ignore it altogether. I don't mind that so much. Some of them ask after you with an exaggerated cordiality which is rather offensive. And every now and then some fool begins to slang the Eurasians and everybody kicks him under the table. Then he remembers about me and goes scarlet. By God, it's hell."

In a small outpost, Harry believed, there would be less social ostracism: "You'll have a much better time at one of the outposts. You see, there are so few white people there that they can't afford to put on frills. They'll be jolly glad to know us both. We shall lead a normal life and be like everybody else."

The same problem concerns Lawson ("The Pool"), who had married a beautiful Eurasian girl from Samoa. All the white ladies of the colony he had known before now ignored him while his bachelor friends cover their embarrassment by 'an exaggerated cordiality.'

Maugham also deals with the problem of the white father and his relations with his half-caste children. Thus, Lawson cannot overcome his disappointment about the predominance of native traits in them. When the first one was born he had been hopeful that the characteristics of the white race would be stronger. "He



had not expected it to be so dark. After all it had but a fourth part of native blood, and there was no reason really why it should not look just like an English baby; but, huddled together in his arms, sallow, its head covered already with black hair, with huge black eyes, it might have been a native child." Although his children have only one fourth of native blood, they belong, at least physically, altogether to the dark race, and he is unable to feel any real love for them: "They don't mean so much to me now. You'd take them for natives anywhere. I have to talk to them in Samoan."

The same disappointment is felt by Guy ("The Force of Circumstance") about his three children by a native girl. When asked, "Do they mean nothing to you at all?" he answers:

"I want to be quite frank with you. I should be sorry if anything happened to them. When the first one was expected I thought I'd be much fonder of it than I had ever been of it's mother. I suppose I should have been if it had been white. Of course, when it was a baby it was rather funny and touching, but I had no particular feeling that it was mine. I think that's what it is; you see, I have no sense of their belonging to me. I've reproached myself sometimes, because it seemed rather unnatural, but the honest truth is that they're no more to me than if they were somebody else's children."

When his English wife Doris learns of his former liaison and the children resulting from it, she is filled with physical revulsion. Although she realises that loneliness and the lack of any white society had driven him into the arms of the native woman, she is unable any longer to love her husband. At the sight of the three dark-skinned children and their mother, her whole soul was in revolt: "You belong to them," she said to Guy, "you don't belong to me. I think perhaps I could have stood it if there'd only been one child, but three; and the boys are quite big boys. For ten years you lived with her . . . It's a physical thing, I can't help it, it's stronger than I am. I think of those thin, black arms of her round you and it fills me with a physical nausea. I think of you holding those little black babies in your arms. Oh, it's loathsome."

Again and again, Maugham points out the difficulties of

parents of half-caste children. Thus, Pryne, an English farmer ("The Door of Opportunity"), one day receives the visit of the District Resident, Alben, and his wife. Fearing that the sight of his native wife and their dark-skinned children might offend her, he hides them until Alben interferes: "Anne isn't that sort of woman at all. Don't dream of hiding them. She loves children." This tolerance, however, is clearly an exception among English women in the East.

Another case of a harmonious union is shown in "The Yellow Streak." Hutchinson, the English Resident, has a permanent native mistress but, in contrast to Guy and Lawson, feels no disappointment about his half-caste children who, to all appearances, look like natives: "It's funny how you get to like them. When they're your own it doesn't seem to matter that they've got a touch of the tar-brush." But Izzart who happens to be present cannot enjoy this seemingly happy family idyll. He knows from his own experience that one day they, too, will become victims of the curse of mixing the two races: "They've got no right to have children. They've got no chance in the world. Ever."

One of the most tragic cases of such a union and its influence upon the white parent is shown in "The Pool." Here the Scotsman Lawson becomes the victim of his deep love for a Eurasian girl, Ethel, the daughter of a Norwegian father and a Polynesian mother. The gradual disintegration of his character is the result of his environment and his marriage with a half-caste. When the narrator first meets him in a hotel bar, he asks:

"Is he often drunk?"

"Dead drunk, three or four days a week. It's the island done it, and Ethel."

"Who's Ethel?"

"Ethel's his wife. Married a half-caste . . . Took her away from here. Only thing to do. But she couldn't stand it, and now they're back again. He'll hang himself one of these days, if he don't drink himself to death before. Good chap. Nasty when he's drunk."

Lawson was unwilling to take Ethel as his mistress but married her instead. Soon he finds his house filled with her relatives, Eurasians as well as natives who no longer treat him with any respect: "His marriage has made him one of themselves and they

called him Bertie. They put their arms through his and smacked him on the back." After the birth of their first son, he is filled with anxiety for his child's future and returns to Scotland, taking his family along. But his wife, "with those deep roots attaching her to the native land," returns to Samoa. Lawson follows her, and now his degeneration sets in. He has lost his good position in the bank in Apia, must accept poorly paid odd jobs and turns to alcohol in his despair. In the end he realises his blunder: "I suppose I ought not to have married Ethel. If I'd kept her it would be all right. But I did love her so." But now it is too late—life has lost its meaning for him. In the same pool where his love idyll with Ethel had started he takes his own life.

This story seems to indicate that a Eurasian girl cannot be transplanted because of her inability to adjust to life in Europe. Moreover, the author wants to stress the misery which may result from a marriage between a European and a Eurasian. Maugham, although not a moralist, is certainly in favour of the separation of races. A temporary liaison, on the other hand, is in no way considered dishonest or harmful, and undoubtedly it would have prevented Lawson's tragic fate.

Most of these marriages in Maugham's Far Eastern narratives appear to be complete failures. Both partners are usually shown as unhappy as a result of the force of convention, according to which the white man is ostracised by European society in the East whenever he mixes with natives. In the sketch "The Consul," an Englishwoman has married a Chinese student whom she had met in London, and again the English race-consciousness is emphasised in the portrayal of the consul who bitterly resents this marriage.

A few exceptions only serve to confirm Maugham's conviction. Though some of these unions appear to be happy, the position of the half-caste children inevitably leads to bitter disappointment on the part of the white father. It is important to stress that in all these stories, Maugham is the neutral, detached observer.

That a different opinion of these problems is possible becomes apparent from a comparison of Maugham's presentation with the views of Stefan Zweig who, it should be stated, had made his observations primarily in Brazil. "There is no colour-bar, no

segregation, no arrogant classification; and nothing is more significant for this natural co-existence than the absence in their language of any derogatory word for people of different blood." (*Brazil, Land of the Future*).

In personal conversation Maugham has explained to this writer why the Eurasians he has met in China, India and the Malay Archipelago were often unhappy. The major reason appears to be the inferior treatment accorded them by the white man. As a matter of principle, Maugham does not believe that favourable results can come of a mixture between Englishmen and the natives in those areas of the Far East which he has visited. In his opinion there is an inevitable gap between white and coloured which cannot be bridged by a mixture of races but, on the contrary, becomes only more prominent.

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## MAUGHAM THE PLAYWRIGHT

By St. John Ervine

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Ervin, St. John Greer. Irish playwright, critic and novelist. Born December 28, 1883. Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, Member of the Irish Academy. Among his best known plays are *Jane Clegg*, *John Ferguson*, and *The First Mrs. Fraser*.

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Somerset Maugham's first play was a one-act piece in German, entitled *Schiffbruchig*, which was produced in Berlin in 1901 when its author was twenty-seven; but this was not his first work, for he began his career as a novelist, and not as a dramatist, and he had written four novels before his earliest play was performed. The first of them, *Liza of Lambeth*, was published in 1897, and immediately established him as a man writing with some authority. This is a remarkable novel for anyone to have written, but that it should have been written by a young medical student only just out of his teens is astonishing. It is a book that no one but a young doctor with a generous and indignant mind could have written, and it is the young and generous and socially-indignant doctor in Mr. Maugham whose reappearance I still confidently await. It is not my business now to treat of Mr. Maugham's novels, of which he has written over a score, except to say that they reveal the dramatist as effectively as do the plays. He tells a story in a terse and quick and vivid manner. He has views, but he subordinates them to his tale, and he can, when he chooses, indulge himself in a long, stylish piece of dialogue, but he prefers to tell a story without wasting time on opinions or extraneous decoration. He seldom diverges from the main avenue, nor is he distracted by side issues, however amusing they may be. No one who has studied his work can imagine him opening a play with a long irrelevant dialogue on ritualism, such as that with which Mr. Shaw opens *The Apple Cart*, nor can anyone imagine him digressing from his theme to discuss the state

of the Irish people in the year A.D. 3000, as Mr. Shaw does so amusingly and at such length in the fourth part of *Back to Methuselah*. Mr. Shaw is, of course, the victim of his opinions, and can easily be diverted from his intention by any idea that comes into his head, but Mr. Maugham is a more austere-disciplined man than Mr. Shaw—how can he be otherwise when he has so much law in his blood?—and will not allow himself to be distracted. His people are assembled and their purpose displayed without fuss or delay. The skill with which he deploys his forces makes me call him a great craftsman, and the fact that this skill has been apparent in all his plays and novels, from his first to his latest, entitles him to be called a born story-teller. His success has undoubtedly damaged him in the eyes of those critics who cannot believe that a writer has any merit if the sale of each of his novels exceeds 500 copies, or if his plays are seen by more than seventeen people. Earnest youths from Oxford and Cambridge and the Polytechnic, when they write assessments of modern literature, seldom deign to mention Mr. Maugham. But his place in our literature is secure and high. He is a better dramatist than Congreve, and his comedy, *The Circle*, is superior to *The Way of the World*, a messy piece in which choice speeches are expected to make up for incompetent arrangement and a plot, only remembered at the last moment, which is so involved that even the devoutest admirer of Congreve cannot unravel it. Mr. Maugham's novels are better than his plays, but only because he takes them more seriously. He could, if he would, become the most notable dramatist of his day.

I have committed the offence which he never commits, I have digressed, or, rather, I have jumped ahead, and I must now come back to my starting-point: the young and generous-minded and socially-indignant doctor who is a house surgeon at St. Thomas's Hospital. The number of doctors who have taken to literature, and taken to it with immense success, is remarkable. In what other profession can a man acquire a greater knowledge of diversified human nature than he can obtain in medicine? In the law, perhaps, although I doubt that; but, in any event, Mr. Maugham, by choosing to belong to a family of lawyers and becoming a doctor, ensured himself a variety of experience and

knowledge, personal and derived, that was invaluable to him as a dramatist and a novelist. It will be well at this point to say that he abandoned medicine. Medicine did not abandon him. He is a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, and during the War he returned to the practice of medicine in the Army. But medicine was not to keep him, and, as we have seen, he was producing novels while he was still dispersing potions, and preparing to make a dramatist of himself between visits to patients. His first appearance on the English stage was in the nature of a misfortune. The play was a sombre piece, entitled *A Man of Honour*, and it was produced by the Stage Society in 1903. The facts that it was sombre and that it was performed by the Stage Society were Mr. Maugham's undoing. Our managers suspect serious authors, especially when they are noticed by the Stage Society, of being no better than they ought to be, and take uncommon care to reject their plays without reading them. Managers, more than other people, love labels, and anyone who wishes to obtain admission to the stage must be careful how he gets himself labelled. If he begins his career by writing a play which can be called gloomy, then the sooner he enters the Civil Service the better it will be for his pocket and his peace of mind. Mr. Maugham made this terrible mistake: he wrote a gloomy play, and was immediately labelled an intellectual dramatist. His typescripts were returned to him with unflattering rapidity. *A Man of Honour*, which was written in 1898, when its author was twenty-four, was refused by half a dozen managers, and it might have been better for Mr. Maugham if it had also been refused by the Stage Society. "I could not help noticing," he says in one of his prefaces, "that a play produced by the Stage Society did not lead to very much. After the two performances they gave it and the notices in the Press, it was as dead as mutton. I felt a trifle flat after the production of *A Man of Honour*. I looked reflectively at the Thames and was conscious that I had not set it on fire. I badly wanted to write plays that would be seen not only by a handful of people. I wanted money and I wanted fame. I did not know then that success on the stage can only bring notoriety. But it was not without misgivings that I turned to comedy. I knew that the drama could only regain its

proper place in the literary life of the time and be of serious import to intelligent men if it dealt in a sincere spirit with life . . . Stifling, then, my honourable scruples I sat down and wrote a comedy which I called *Loaves and Fishes*. The chief character was the fashionable vicar of a London parish. It was refused by every manager to whom it was sent on the ground that the public would not care to see the cloth held up to ridicule," a strange ground for rejection when one remembers how avidly the public read the novels of Anthony Trollope, how popular was *The Private Secretary*. The young author, who had already written and published five novels, felt despondent about his chances of becoming a dramatist, and his despair was increased when, walking with Mr. Max Beerbohm on the pleasant lawns of Merton Abbey, he heard himself advised by that elegant author to give up all hope of theatrical success. Ibsen, too, but more abruptly, was told to leave the stage. The leading dramatic critic of Copenhagen, who is now, no doubt, repenting of his folly in hell, harshly recommended the young Norwegian, as the young Keats had been urged, to return to his apothecary's shop and devote to pills and plasters the talent he was so wantonly devoting to the drama. William Archer once publicly besought Mr. Bernard Shaw to withdraw from the theatre, for which, Archer asserted, he had obviously no talent whatever! But Mr. Maugham was not to be daunted by Mr. Max Beerbohm any more than Keats was to be gilled by the *Quarterly* or Ibsen to be returned to his apothecary's shop or Mr. Shaw to be kept on platforms. *Loaves and Fishes* having failed to find a producer, Mr. Maugham immediately wrote what he fondly imagined to be a light comedy which would irresistibly attract a popular actress. He has always shown a remarkable indifference to the requirements of managers and players, and the light comedy which followed *Loaves and Fishes* flouted all the popular stage conventions and invited the refusals it promptly received. For it included a scene in which the leading actress had to show herself to the public in the utmost disarray, "with no make-up on, and have her hair done while she arranged her face before the audience." It is hard to blame the actress who declined to look at the play. Manager after manager refused it. If this was the reward of a man who tried to



write popular light comedies, Mr. Maugham might as well have earned the label of a gloomy dramatist and have continued to produce sour-minded pieces. But he was resolved to write a pleasant little play, and so, while *Loaves and Fishes* and *Lady Frederick* continued to be rejected, he wrote *Mrs. Dot*, as nearly as he could in what he believed to be the fashionable formula. "It was," he says, "refused as uniformly as *Lady Frederick* had been. The managers praised the dialogue, but complained that there was not enough action, and one of them suggested that I should put in a burglary. I did not see my way to this." He was now beginning to be daunted, and although he set about the writing of another light comedy, *Jack Straw*, he felt sufficiently despondent to remark to Mr. Harley Granville-Barker, as they strolled one morning through St. James's Park, that it seemed useless for him to try any longer to win a place in the theatre. He had almost abandoned hope and was inclined to put his trust exclusively in novels. A few weeks later, three of these plays, which had been rejected many times, together with a fourth piece, called *The Explorer*, were being acted simultaneously with great success in the West End, a record which has not been broken, and their author, who had with the utmost difficulty raised the price of the fare from Italy to England to attend the rehearsals of *Lady Frederick*, found himself a rich man, eagerly sought after by managers and actors. The first of the oft-rejected pieces, *Lady Frederick*,<sup>1</sup> was performed 422 times; the second, *Mrs. Dot*, 272 times; and the third, *Jack Straw*, 321 times. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Lady Frederick*, a comedy in three acts, marks the turning point in Maugham's career. Written in 1903, it was first presented by Otto Stuart at the Royal Court Theatre, London on October 26, 1907. Within 10 months it had 422 performances, and when it was revived in 1913 and 1946 respectively, had a similar success.

In *The Summing Up* Maugham says: "I came to the conclusion that my best chance was to write a comedy with a big part for an actress, who, if she liked it, might induce a manager to give the play a trial. I asked myself what sort of part would be likely to appeal to a leading lady, and having made up my mind on this point, wrote *Lady Frederick*. But its most effective scene, the scene that afterwards made it so successful, was one in which the heroine, in order to disillusion a young lover, let him come into her dressing room and discover her without any make-up on her face and with her hair dishevelled. At that distant time make-up was not universal and most women wore false hair. But no actress would consent to let an audience see her in this condition and manager after manager refused it." (Editor's Note).

fourth play, *The Explorer*, a sterner piece than these three, was less successful. Mr. Maugham is now the author of twenty-eight plays, of which only eighteen are included in the Collected Edition, these eighteen, he too modestly says, being all that he wishes to preserve. His latest play, *Sheppey*, he declares, is the last that he will write in his capacity as a "professional dramatist." This announcement is worded in a way which does not preclude the hope that Mr. Maugham may write many plays for his own entertainment or for experimental purposes. In the preface to the fifth volume, he discusses the possibility of finding new methods of expression in drama, new ways of writing dialogue, and this discussion inspires the belief that he may surprise and gratify his admirers with the production of plays of greater quality than any he has yet written. His excuse for abandoning the theatre does not stand examination. "I am conscious," he says, "that I am no longer in touch with the public that patronises the theatre." He, therefore, steps on to the shelf, as a dramatist, although he refuses to mount it as a novelist. Amazed at this decision of a man who was only sixty when he made it, his admirers reminded him that many great authors, from Aeschylus to Mr. Shaw, produced great works, sometimes their greatest, after they had become septuagenarians. Aeschylus produced his finest extant work, the *Orestes Trilogy*, when he was sixty-seven. Sophocles produced the *Philoctetes*, when he was eighty-seven. About eight of the extant plays out of the ninety-two Euripides is alleged to have written were produced after he was sixty, and these are among the best of his works, and include the two plays on *Iphigenia*. Mr. Shaw wrote about a dozen plays after his sixtieth birthday, including *Heartbreak House*, which is sometimes said to be his best work; *Saint Joan*, which is his most popular play; and *Back to Methuselah*, which is really five plays pretending to be one. We have every right, therefore, to refuse to accept Mr. Maugham's resignation as a dramatist, professional or otherwise.

His plays can, I think, be placed in three clearly-marked groups. The first group contains the light comedies, such as *Lady Frederick*, in which Mr. Maugham himself scarcely obtrudes a thought. I shall not, I hope, be regarded as saying that these

comedies are thoughtless because I say that. I mean only that the first group of plays consists of pieces in which the author is content to tell a story without adding any views or opinions of his own to it. The feat may seem impossible, since the very way in which an author tells a story may be said to be an expression of his views or opinions, but there are no didactics in these early and exceptionally well-made plays, no argument, no disquisition. The difference between *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Hamlet* is not greater than the difference between *Jack Straw* and *Sheppey*. Experience of life has not yet tinged Mr. Maugham's mind with his individual colour; he is content in this first group of plays to be an entertainer, and he offers no comment or remarks of his own. The second group, in which the cynicism commonly attributed to him reveals itself, is mainly concerned with the question of marriage. It includes plays so dissimilar as *Cæsar's Wife*, *The Circle*, and *The Constant Wife*. Some of the cynicism which was oppressive in these plays in performance has been pruned from them in the Collected Edition. A few lines in *The Constant Wife*, in which a character expresses the belief that there are no happy marriages in the sense of continuous love throughout life, have been removed. But there remains enough cynicism in this group to discompose the average English playgoer, to whom cynicism is as distasteful as satire. The third group is the latest, and contains plays of deepening bitterness, such as his morality play, *For Services Rendered*, and also one other play, his last to be produced though we hope it will not be the last he will write, the piece called *Sheppey*. In this play Mr. Maugham gives us a glimpse of that generous-minded and socially-indignant doctor who will, I believe, surprise and delight us with a noble play if Mr. Maugham will allow him to assert himself.

The story of *Lady Frederick* is a familiar one, in spite of the freshness of its treatment, and variations of it are to be found in *David Garrick* and in a short play by Sir James Barrie, called *Rosalind*. In each of these plays a middle-aged person, a woman or a man, is ardently loved by a youth or a girl, and the dramatist shows the disillusionment of the young lover as a result of the deliberate act of the beloved. In *David Garrick*, the great actor repels the alderman's daughter by pretending to be drunk and

displaying excessive rudeness to her father's guests. In *Rosalind*, an actress allows a young admirer to see her without her stage array, wearing spectacles and an old wrapper. In *Lady Frederick*, a frayed and impecunious lady of title, magnanimously disillusions her young and wealthy lover by letting him enter her dressing-room and see her without cosmetics or curls. In this play Mr. Maugham repeats an infallible trick of the theatre, one that was performed, for example, by Sir Arthur Pinero in *His House in Order*. He makes Lady Frederick, who has been grossly insulted by the Marchioness of Mereston, the young man's mother, and is in desperate need of money, forego a great advantage over that lady. Letters have come into her possession which prove that the late Marquess, a man of public piety, maintained a mistress at the same time that he maintained his wife. Lady Frederick burns the letters so that the knowledge is forever withheld from Lady Mereston, and she suffers her enemy's insults even as she is burning them. An act of magnanimity never fails to stir enthusiasm in an audience, and Mr. Maugham uses it with as much skill as it was used by Pinero.

*Lady Frederick* is written in the Congreve-Sheridan-Wilde manner. All the characters, even if they are servants, speak in epigrams. It is a traditional English Comedy of manners. Mr. Maugham, indeed, with cynical frankness says that when the play was bought by Mr. George Taylor for production in America, he was requested by that gentleman to let him have some more epigrams. "I went away and in two hours wrote twenty-four." It is not generally known that Wilde, by fitting the duchesses in his comedies with epigrammatic minds, contributed to the decline of the privileged class in this country. Duchesses in the 'nineties led lives of misery because Wilde had accustomed the public to believe that words of wit and even of wisdom incessantly fell from their lips, and a number of these unhappy women, almost distracted by their ambition to live up to their reputation, hired impoverished and unscrupulous journalists to supply them with a dozen assorted epigrams every day during the London season! The result of this subterfuge was that duchesses began to talk like leading articles, and have never since been able to hold up their heads.

In *Lady Frederick* it is evident that the author's experience of life is still small, and that his indignation exceeds his wisdom. He hates hypocrisy and snobbery, and is passionately on the side of the rebels. He does not yet know that conventional and orthodox people have a case, and is inclined to believe that good nature is an excellent substitute for uprightness. He persuades us to like Lady Frederick, and overlooks the fact that she is a thoroughly bad hat. One does not feel in this play the hand of the master who has sampled life in many forms and has come to a conclusion about it, but one does feel the firm hand of a very accomplished craftsman. Mr. Maugham's plays are all exceedingly well constructed. This comedy, *Lady Frederick*, almost acts itself, it is so well built.

I shall not refer to the other plays in this early group, since they have the same characteristics as *Lady Frederick*. Each of them is a model of fine skill, and each of them is good entertainment, even if the people in them seldom seem to be worth the trouble their author takes to show them as they are. Mr. Maugham would, I do not doubt, disapprove of that statement, and, up to a point, I should acknowledge his right to disapprove of it. The fact that people exist is, perhaps, excuse enough for writing about them. "If way to the better there be," said Thomas Hardy, "it exacts a full look at the worst," and great authors have passionately insisted on their right to express themselves through any sort of person, as, indeed, the Almighty Himself has done. There are patriarchs in the Old Testament whom I would not care to have in my house. Abraham was a very obnoxious and cowardly old man, who did not hesitate on one occasion to palm off his wife, Sarah, as his sister, lest her beauty should enchant, as indeed it did, Abemelech, the King of Gerar, a very decent man who succeeded by a logical argument in convincing God that the divine intention to destroy him for attempting to possess Sarah was exceedingly unjust. I have never cared much for Samuel, and I find episodes in the life of Moses which a Plymouth Brother would have difficulty in excusing. All creators insist on their right to use any material that comes their way. Mr. Maugham is, therefore, entitled to say that the characters in these and his later plays are as capable as finer people of serving his purpose. But

there is, surely, a danger of making a lop-sided world when we express our feelings about it only through paltry or ignominious people? Eastern people, according to Dr. Ranjee G. Shahani, find fault with Shakespeare because "there is no saint or martyr" in his world. It was "the spectacle, not the meaning, of life" which interested him. Dr. Shahani is not quite accurate in saying there is no saint or martyr in Shakespeare's world. There is one, Joan of Arc, but we know to our shame how he treated her. It is an appalling thought that our poet took the mob's estimate of the Maid as a strumpet who was bearing a bastard, or, at all events, pretended that she was, to whom she scarcely knew; but dare we suppose that if a Maid were to lead victorious troops against us to-day, we should be chivalrous enough to refrain from accusing her of spending orgiastic nights with her generals? What would be thought by elderly ladies and gentlemen in Cheltenham and Bath, to say nothing of Tunbridge Wells, if an announcer were to broadcast the news that an enemy girl of eighteen slept every night in the open fields, lying side by side with rough and ribald and licentious . . . If I feel depressed because Shakespeare could think the worst of such a girl, I am uplifted by the thought that Mr. Maugham would give her the benefit of the doubt and would probably think no harm of her. And that fact, Mr. Maugham might well insist, is sufficient excuse for his habit, in the majority of his plays, of interesting himself in ignominious men and women. A man may acquire charity by contemplating people of little quality, even if he runs the risk of giving himself airs of superiority or becoming a prig. It is, nevertheless a pity for an author to restrict himself to charitable contemplation of insignificant people, as Mr. Maugham, in spite of his reputation for bitterness and cynicism, may be said to do.

The second group of his plays, in spite of its brilliance, is not one on which I propose to dilate. It is entirely concerned with marital relations, and suffers from the confusion of thought which is evident when a problem is too narrowly examined. Mr. Maugham appears to be distressed by the fact that marriages are sometimes unhappy, and in his distress he ignores the fact that happy marriages are commoner. If they were not, the institution of marriage would long ago have been dissolved, and mankind

would have found some other method of gratifying its desires for perpetuation. The most that Mr. Maugham is willing to allow in this group of plays is that people agree to make the best of a bad job. They settle down in a state of suspended antipathy or they develop a tolerant affection for each other. There is not, except in *Sheppey*, a single happy or even affectionate marriage in the whole of the Maugham plays. There is a hint of happiness in *Smith* and *The Land of Promise*, but in the first of these plays the marriage is only arranged—it has not taken place when the comedy ends—and in the second, it has only begun. The inquisitive student of the Maugham drama will notice that in both these plays the marriage is one of unequals. In *Smith*, a very dexterously-written play, Tom Freeman, who has taken to farming in Rhodesia, returns to England to find a wife. He frankly admits that he is looking for a capable woman who will look after his house, cook his meals, keep his clothes in repair, and, in her spare time, bear any children he wants. After a brief contact with the women of his sister's circle, he decides that the upper middle-class is hopeless, and he proposes to her parlour-maid, a tranquil and vigorous girl who seems likely to satisfy all his requirements. This girl is one of the finest figures in the Maugham gallery of characters, and is the model, one may suppose, for Sheppey's wife. In *The Land of Promise*, Norah Marsh, a companion to an elderly and exceedingly unpleasant old lady at Tunbridge Wells, agrees to marry a Canadian roughneck, Frank Taylor, to escape from the nagging of her working-class sister-in-law. Norah, who had been promised a large bequest by her employer as a reward for refusing a young doctor and devoting herself to the unscrupulous old woman, emigrates to Canada when she finds that the bequest has not been made. In Canada, living on a farm, her ladylike incompetence is instantly revealed, and the unfortunate girl learns that her small accomplishments, such as "doing the flowers" and taking the little dog for a walk and reading the less exacting parts of the *Morning Post* to her tiresome and mean-minded old lady, have no worth in Manitoba.

Apart from the felicity of Sheppey's marriage, and the hints in *Smith* and *The Land of Promise* that affection may develop, there is no happiness in the Maugham marriages. *Cæsar's Wife*,

where the unequals are a man of forty-five and a girl of twenty, ends with what may be called a reconciliation seen only at its beginning. We are not told how it continued. Mr. Maugham, apparently, has not noticed that the majority of marriages are affectionate and that the history of marriage is illuminated by numerous instances of great love and devotion that have lasted for life, nor has he noticed the singular felicity which attends the marriage of people who share the same enthusiasm or are engaged in the same work. Such dissimilar couples as William and Catherine Booth, Pierre and Marie Curie, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and Charlotte and Bernard Shaw, prove that Mr. Maugham's point of view falls far short of a complete statement of fact.

It is fair to say, however, that there is a love scene in *The Circle* which is charming enough to be called beautiful. When Elizabeth says to Teddy, with whom she proposes to elope, "I am giving up all my hope of happiness," Teddy replies: "But I wasn't offering you happiness. I don't think my sort of love tends to happiness. I'm jealous. I'm not a very easy man to get on with. I'm often out of temper and irritable. I should be fed to the teeth with you sometimes, and so would you be with me. I daresay we'd fight like cat and dog, and sometimes we'd hate each other. Often you'd be wretched and bored stiff and lonely, and often you'd be frightfully homesick, and then you'd regret all you'd lost. Stupid women would be rude to you because we'd run away together. And some of them would cut you. I don't offer you peace and quietness. I offer you unrest and anxiety. I don't offer you happiness. I offer you love." To which Elizabeth replies, "You hateful creature, I absolutely adore you," and off he and she go together. The speech reminds us of Garibaldi recruiting his Thousand or William Booth enlisting his soldiers. "I offer you wounds and death," said Garibaldi. When he was asked what their wages would be, Booth told his officers, "Brick ends, rotten eggs, fish and the like." Garibaldi got his Thousand, and Booth got his soldiers.

But if the point of view is faulty, the plays, so far as the construction is concerned, are not. Mr. Maugham's skill appears at its best in *Smith*, where he manages a difficult situation with



exceptional dexterity. He has to contrive meetings between a parlour-maid and a guest in the house where she is employed in such a manner that the audience never even wonders how these two came to know each other well enough to fall in love. The play is divided into four acts instead of three, the number employed in all its predecessors, and this division, in itself, is a sign of the success of Mr. Maugham's craftsmanship. He knows exactly when to change the lay-out of a play. Mr. Maugham regards the second act of *The Land of Promise* as "very good," and it is, but the third act of *Smith* is technically perfect. It is masterly because it is not mechanical. The devices appear in a natural order. Each incident grows out of its predecessor. The arrangement is not that of a series of cogs neatly fitting together, but of a flow of events that inevitably follow each other. *This* happens because *that* happened, and as the events occur and pass, the nature of the characters appears and develops. In a scene of singular brevity and effectiveness, the sensibility of Smith is made manifest, the quality that Freeman desires in his mate is plainly revealed. This scene is swiftly followed by three scenes, one in which Freeman is deeply disillusioned by his shallow sister, one in which the middle-class woman he had thought of marrying shows him very clearly that his life and hers cannot meet and mingle, and she suggests to him that he should marry Smith, and one in which he proves, simply and naturally, to Smith that he is the sort of man she likes and admires.

Mr. Maugham occasionally, but only occasionally, sacrifices veracity to theatrical effect. He makes this sacrifice in *Our Betters*, which, in spite of its unpleasantness and, I venture to believe, its untruth, enjoyed great popularity. It is difficult to believe that the young American girl, Bessie, on finding her sister in a very compromising situation, would immediately rush into the drawing-room, communicate her knowledge to all the guests, and burst into floods of tears. The modern American girl is not demure enough to drop a tear or show the slightest surprise at what Bessie saw in the Japanese tea-house. If Bessie's behaviour is doubtful, her sister's is still more doubtful. It is almost impossible to believe that Pearl, on returning to the drawing-room with the gigolo,

and learning that her conduct in the tea-house has been discovered by Bessie and disclosed to the guests, would turn to the gigolo and say, "You damned fool, I told you it was too risky!" The unreality of this scene was plainer when it was acted in London than it is in the printed play, for the end was altered at the request of the Lord Chamberlain, who proposed that the discovery in the tea-house should be made by the young man who wishes to marry Bessie, and not by Bessie. Why the Lord Chamberlain should have supposed that this alteration would render the discovery innocuous is not easy to understand, but it certainly made the situation less plausible; for who can suppose that any young man, in such circumstances, would come blurting out the facts to a drawing-room full of comparative strangers or even to intimate friends? The young man would, surely, have glossed over the curious sight he had witnessed, although, of course, in doing so he would have ruined a good curtain and might even have injured the last act. *Our Betters* swings on an improbability, and when a play does that, it is a bad play.

When we turn to the third group of plays, we find the most definite signs of the Maugham we are seeking. They are intensely bitter in their tone, and the bitterness is often wilful, but they reveal a concern about depths of life that is absent from the other groups. The first of the group is *The Unknown*, which was produced immediately after the War. In this play, Mr. Maugham treats a soldier's loss of religious faith as a result of his experiences in the trenches. The play has the dramatic effects we expect to find in his work, but the loss of faith is less impressive than it ought to be, chiefly because it does not appear to have any basis in the mind, but to be entirely due to an emotional process. There are pious people who say that they believe in the existence of God because they have seen a beautiful sunset. They might as well assert a disbelief in His existence because of a wet or foggy day or a gale at sea. The existence of God does not depend on meteorological conditions. The fact that the War occurred is not proof that there is no God, or that He is unjust, but it was the fact of the War which shattered such faith as John Wharton possessed. That does not appear to have amounted to much. He was a routine Christian, adhering to the Church of England

because he had been brought up in it and because it was the church of people of his class. He had not that profound piety which enables a man to retain his faith in all adversity. But although the play does not deal with the religion of a man of the character of Job or Jeremiah, it does deal very justly with the religion of a man of the upbringing and education and intelligence of John Wharton, and Mr. Maugham indisputably shows the disintegrating effect which the War had on the religious beliefs of many people whose profession of faith was entirely routine. There is a scene in this play which excites some scepticism. Wharton has been engaged for a long time to Sylvia Bullough, the sort of dully-pious young woman who infests English villages and makes ministers of religion doubt the beneficence of God. Sylvia breaks off her engagement on hearing of John's defection from his faith, a breach which, in the circumstances, is not easy to credit. A religious woman would have realised in what distress of mind John's loss had been incurred, and although she might have been daunted by St. Paul's injunction in the second epistle to the Corinthians that she should not be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever, she might have heartened herself with his statement in the first epistle that the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife. It is possible, of course, that the second epistle would have prevailed over the first in Sylvia's mind, for she was a poor creature with a passion for uncomfortable piety. We remember, too, that Christina Rossetti refused to marry an unbeliever whom she deeply loved, but her refusal was made in different circumstances from those which attended Sylvia Bullough's. The incident which excites doubt occurs in the third act, when Sylvia, for reasons which pass all understanding and make her appear to suffer from mental obliquity, conceals the fact of his father's death from John and begs him to go to Communion because his refusal to take the Sacrament is tormenting the dying man. "If you received the Communion, John, it would give your father peace." And John, after some argument, goes to the Communion-rails and takes the Sacrament in spite of his apostacy. The discovery of this trick, incredible as it is stupid, abolishes John's love for Sylvia, but the play, by this time, has fallen to pieces and we do not care what

becomes of her and are less interested than we were in John. It is, nevertheless, a remarkable work, one, too, which enables us to learn something of the faith that fills its author; for the speech uttered by Dr. Macfarlane in the last act may be regarded as representative of Dr. Maugham's. "I don't believe that God is all-powerful and all-knowing," says Dr. Macfarlane, who might almost be repeating the creed of Mr. Shaw. "But I think He struggles against evil as we do. I don't believe He means to chasten us by suffering or to purify us by pain. I believe pain and suffering are evil, and that He hates them, and would crush them if He could. And I believe that in this age-long struggle between God and evil, we can help, all of us, even the meanest; for in some way, I don't know how, I believe that all our goodness adds to the strength of God, and perhaps—who can tell?—will give Him such power that at last He will be able utterly to destroy evil—utterly, with its pain and suffering. When we're good, we're buying silver bullets for the King of Heaven, and when we're bad, well, we're trading with the enemy."

This profession of faith is far from satisfying. A limited God makes a limited appeal, and we are bound to believe that if God is limited, then there must be some force behind Him which is unlimited even if we have not the faintest idea of its purpose. But the fact that so grave a play as this could be produced in 1920 gives us cause to feel a greater respect for our theatre than we are sometimes ready to give it. The second significant play in this group is the morality, *For Services Rendered*, a play profoundly moving even when it fails to convince the spectator that it is a fair presentation of fact. Mr. Maugham overloads the Ardsley family with calamity. No single group of people ever were so overwhelmed by disaster as this family is, or if there ever were a family so generally distressed, the fault, we feel, was in its members and not in their stars. Very wilfully Mr. Maugham attributes to the environment of the Ardsleys what ought, if it be credible at all, to be attributed to their own nature, although, perhaps, one might say that one's nature is part of one's environment. If, however, there is any such thing as freewill, if men, as Macbeth says, still have judgment here, we are entitled to say that these Ardsleys had only themselves to blame for their misfortunes, and

if there is no such thing as freewill, then what is the use of calling attention to what cannot be helped? Mr. Maugham is not content to portray the Ardsleys as suffering and invertebrate people, but increases their company by neighbours who suffer and are as invertebrate as themselves. One almost imagines that the Ardsleys spread an infection of inertia among their acquaintances and friends. There is not a happy or successful person among them, with the exception, perhaps, of Mrs. Ardsley's brother, a doctor, of whom, however, we know so little that he may be suffering from more complaints than all the others put together. One feels repelled when, in the last act, Mr. Maugham announces Mrs. Ardsley's impending death from cancer. The accumulation of catastrophe and disaster is too much, a wilful act on the author's part, as if he were determined to screw the last ounce of agony out of his characters and his audience. Mr. Maugham might reply to his critics that what is sauce for him ought to be sauce for Shakespeare. Why should the Elizabethan be allowed to pile calamity in *Hamlet*, to the extent of strewing the stage with dead bodies in the last act, when the Georgian is denied the right to rather fewer calamities? Mr. Maugham, in making Eva Ardsley dress up in finery, after she has lost her wits, and causing her to sing a snatch of song, is surely only repeating Shakespeare's behaviour to Ophelia? There is a difference, and it counts to Mr. Maugham's disadvantage. The disasters in *Hamlet* are not wilfully brought about by the author. The disasters in *For Services Rendered* are. Mr. Maugham's people are not, as Shakespeare's are, caught in a net of circumstances: they are thrust into the net by their creator, who gives them inert natures and deprives them of all hope of escape. Shakespeare's people clench their fists: Mr. Maugham's, like John Galsworthy's, put up their hands. There is a character in this play, Sydney Ardsley, who has been blinded as a result of wounds sustained in the War. Our instinct to pity the blind does not prevent us from realising that Sydney is a disagreeable and inert and even cruel man, who wantonly wounds his sister, although she has sacrificed herself for him. He lies down under his disability and becomes a Blind Fury who has lost all charity, if he ever had any, all love and kindly feeling for everybody and everything. His father remarks that he had hoped that

Sydney would become a solicitor and succeed to his practice, but, of course, his blindness had killed that hope. Why? one wonders. At the opening of the play, he is forty years of age. It is probable, therefore, that he had had some experience as an articled clerk in his father's office before the outbreak of the War. He may have qualified as a solicitor. Is there any cause to prevent him from resuming the practice of the law? His blindness? But blind men, with less experience of sight than Sydney, have overcome their affliction. Henry Fawcett lost his sight at the age of twenty-five, but he became a notable economist, occupying the Chair of Political Economy at Cambridge, and was made Postmaster-General by Mr. Gladstone and proved himself to be a most capable head of a department. Another blind man, and one apter to this occasion than Fawcett, was the late Sir Washington Ranger, who lost his sight when he was fourteen, and, therefore, had far less visual experience than either Fawcett or Sydney Ardsley, but became one of the leading lawyers in the City of London. Have we not heard of Miss Helen Keller who, though blind and deaf and dumb almost from infancy, has overcome her darkened eyes and silent tongue and unrecording ears? Sydney Ardsley does nothing, nor does he try to do anything, and the spectator, even if his heart be sympathetic, feels assured that this man would have been just as flabby with his sight as he was without it. A similar feeling pervades the spectator in connection with the axed naval officer, Collie Stratton, who commits suicide because he is in danger of arrest for uttering stumer cheques. I well remember the scorn with which a captain in the Navy said of Stratton, "He was the sort of man who would always have been running his ship aground!" It is the sensation the spectator has that the people in *For Services Rendered* are backboneless that makes it a little repellent, but, in spite of the sensation, the play is, indisputably, a moving and sincere tragedy, with moments of great beauty. The scene in which Eva Ardsley asks Collie Stratton to marry her is full of fine feeling.

Mr. Maugham is at his best and finest in *Sheppey*. Here, again, he is troubled by religion. Is there never to be any compatibility between faith and practice? Must men always and for ever fall

below their own standards and betray their ideals? The good-natured barber who wins £8,500 in the Irish Sweepstake is suddenly stricken down, as Saul was on his way to Damascus, and rises up a changed man. All his plans for a comfortable life are abandoned. He reads St. Luke's account of the young man with great possessions who came to Jesus and asked what he should do to inherit eternal life. The fact that Mr. Maugham chooses the version of this story given by St. Luke is significant, for St. Luke, like Mr. Maugham, was a physician, and he was notable among the Synoptists for his style. The injunction given to the rich young man, "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" is accepted by Sheppey as an injunction to himself. "It was," he says, "like a great white light, I saw my way plain before me. I'm going to give this money of mine to them as needs it more than I do." This proposal to take the Christian religion seriously distresses his family, especially his dreadful daughter and her more dreadful young man, and causes them to think that he is out of his mind. Jesus Himself had a similar experience when He returned to His own country and was uncivilly received by His friends, who said that He was beside Himself. The vision which St. Paul saw, while he was still Saul, is said by Schweitzer, a saintly doctor, to have been the result of an epileptiform seizure, and it appears from the medical testimony that Sheppey, too, suffers from a disease of the mind which amounts to acute mania. The doctors are ready to certify him that he may be confined to an asylum. It is here that I find Mr. Maugham at fault. If Sheppey is mad, then the play has no meaning, and Sheppey's daughter and her young man are entirely justified in their attitude towards him. And, apparently, Sheppey is mad. Mr. Maugham, in the preface to the play, refers to the interview between Sheppey and Death as "an hallucination of Sheppey's disordered mind." I do not know what he means by "disordered." Any person of original ideas appears "disordered", if not actually insane, to people of routine ideas. Mr. Maugham may mean that Sheppey is only "disordered" in the sense of being unusual or of being a Christian, but I am afraid he, too, shares Dr. Ennismore's belief that the barber is suffering from acute mania. How, then,

can we be expected to take a serious interest in his point of view? This would have been a far different play had Mr. Maugham assumed, as he might very reasonably have done, that Sheppey was saner than his doctor and his daughter, and have shown us what happens to a man who has the audacity to believe that Jesus meant what He said. Mr. Maugham makes no effort to see the situation as a practical proposal, and it has here to be noted that the story of the young man who had great possessions is at once among the most familiar and the least understood of the tales of the New Testament. Jesus' injunction to this young man is regarded as a general injunction, although it is evident that if everybody was to sell all that they have and give to the poor, the essential economic situation would not be changed. There would merely be a transfer of property from one set of people to another. The injunction was addressed to one person, and it was addressed to him because of his besetting sin—greed. He could not become a disciple because he was demented, as Walt Whitman says, with the mania for owning things. But if the young man by a great effort of will and spirit had accepted the divine advice, and had sold all his possessions, and had followed Jesus, might he not have entered a life of experience transcending anything he had hitherto known? That is the play Mr. Maugham ought to have written. It is the play he has still to write.

If, however, *Sheppey* fails us in its central argument, it does not fail us in its humanity. The young, indeed, come off badly in *Sheppey*, as they come off in nearly all Mr. Maugham's plays. How one loathes the young people in *The Breadwinner*, an ignobly conceited and mindless lot! Sheppey's daughter is a mean-minded creature, full of greed and without the bowels of compassion, and her fiancé, a council-school snob and prig, is even nastier, with his debating-society smartness and Rotary Club wisdom. He has more than his share of the dull man's passion for uniformity. "It's always presumption," he says, "to think you know better than other people," oblivious that no one in the play is more presumptuous than himself. When Mrs. Miller, exasperated by his slick disposal of the entire universe, ventures to inquire how he knows that Sheppey is not sane and that it "ain't all the rest of us are potty," he replies, "That's absurd.



Sanity means doing what everybody else does, and thinking what everybody else thinks. That's the whole foundation of democracy. If the individual isn't prepared to act the same way as everybody else, there's only one place for him, and that's the lunatic asylum." One feels that Ernie has been reading the later prefaces of Mr. Bernard Shaw. But Sheppey and his wife are pure gold, and the prostitute, Bessie, has virtues that make her vices seem unimportant. Few scenes in our drama are so moving as the manifestations of Mrs. Miller's simple love for her husband, and his for her. There is beauty in the commonplace language of this working-woman, whose pride in her housekeeping and her cooking is impressive in these times when skill is despised and cooks are giving place to tin-openers. In *Sheppey*, confused and beautiful and tender, Mr. Maugham makes his farewell to the theatre, but we have every right to refuse to accept his resignation and to demand that he shall go on from *Sheppey* to the great play that is still in his head. In Mr. Yeats's play, *The Shadowy Waters*, Forgael says:

"I can see nothing; all's a mystery.  
Yet sometimes there's a torch inside my head  
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone  
I have but images, analogies,  
The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,  
The red rose where the two shafts of the cross,  
Body and Soul, waking and sleeping, death, life,  
Whatever meaning ancient allegorists,  
Have settled on, are mixed into one joy.  
For what's the rose but that? miraculous cries,  
Old stories about mystic marriages,  
Impossible truths? But when the torch is lit  
All that is impossible is certain."

Mr. Maugham must not put out the torch. He owes a duty to the young and generous-minded and socially-indignant doctor who lit a flame in Lambeth that must not be extinguished.

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## SOMERSET MAUGHAM AND POSTERITY

By Glenway Wescott

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Wescott, Glenway. American novelist and essayist. Born on a Wisconsin farm, April 11, 1901. Author of several novels, among them *The Grandmothers*, 1927; *The Pilgrim Hawk*, 1940; *Apartment in Athens* (Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1945); a collection of essays, *Fear and Trembling*, 1932; a volume of poems, *Natives of the Rock*, 1926; introduction to *Short Novels of Colette*, 1951.

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W. Somerset Maugham is the dean of novelists writing in English at present. By which advertisement-like statement I mean that he is the one, the only one, who for more than a quarter of a century has had the admiration of an elite of highly cultivated, sophisticated readers and of a sufficient number of good fellow-writers, with increasing influence on the younger ones; and at the same time has given great pleasure to, made sense to, and affected the lives of, a million or more ordinary mortals. What else is deanship? It is not a matter of unanimity. Only, in the condition of modern culture, the small superior group in agreement or in coalition with the multitude is very apt to overrule or overwhelm any objection that may start up in medium intellectual circles. Evidently this is what has happened about Maugham, leaving perhaps a vague resentment in the minds of some of those who might be expected to mould (and indeed unmould) contemporary opinion, and are scarcely doing so in his case.

He has become the most controversial literary figure of our time as well as the most successful. As controversies go this has a certain distinction, in that nothing of miscellaneous thought is at issue, neither politics nor morals nor other ideology. It is all about literary art: whether he is a great artist in any way, or only an ordinary one; whether his career has been a true vocation, or a simple matter of ambition and energetic endeavour crowned

with odd success; and whether his fiction is of a high category, or just a present plaything for the mind of a commonplace throng. Unfortunately the arguments pro and con have not been presented at full length or with sufficient clarity and conviction. I cannot think of another important man of letters about whom there is so little to read, of any interest. In both the praise and the blame a few conventional terms keep appearing, as in a kaleidoscope around and around; and in the last decade or so the blamers have shown more verve and self-assurance than the praisers. Our diligent book-reviewers, perhaps having written themselves dry about him long since, have reacted lassitudinously to the almost annual succession of his books. One or two of our noteworthy serious critics, offended in taste or dissatisfied in intellect, entirely lost their patience with this or that recent book, with a peculiar effect of trying to shame the rest of us out of our enjoyment.

As a rule perhaps one ought not to take cognizance of this kind of adverse opinion, or of the group-thinking and conversation of intellectuals which it may be taken to reflect. It cannot be answered in any detail without giving it emphasis and further circulation. But in the instance of Maugham at present it seems worthwhile because he is to be blamed for some of the confusion and the repetitiousness. The little forewords which he has contributed to various editions of his work, likewise his essay "On Style (After Reading Burke)" and the piece upon his sixty-fifth birthday and his brief address at the Library of Congress, are of particular interest in this connection.

We must allow for a certain manner of the English gentleman, as it were a self-satisfied modesty. Furthermore, here and there, we may sense in his principles of literature a slight inflexibility, almost affectation; and he harps upon some of his preferences and theories. Sometimes this is his way of criticising (without unkindly naming) fellow-writers whose reputations have appeared to him undeserved or unsound. All his life he has had to share the literary scene with various genius-types, forever boasting. This, I think, inclines him to the extreme of unpretentiousness. Others make a glamour of their pure artistry without producing much, all blow and no go. It may be this which has

prompted him to set up as a principle, even a duty, that nonstop productivity which comes naturally to him, and which he so greatly enjoys. Now and then he seems to be suggesting that anyone who is not capable of it might as well give up literature; which would be a pity. Others talk all the time of their inspiration and dedication, message and messianic feeling. Very well, he will speak only of the profession of writing, the career, even the pursuit of a fortune . . . A man cannot live for half a century in a great constant limelight, sought after and indiscreetly questioned in society, meanwhile subject to changeable and illogical standards of the taste of the day, without developing some self-consciousness.

In all this various confidential expository writing he has presented himself, or one might say, typed himself, as having only a limited specific talent; as not knowing or thinking much about anything outside his field of professional dramaturgy and narration; as having no vision of the state of the world, no psychological science, no profundity; and as not admitting any intention in his writing except to entertain. "The purpose of art is to please." He should have been warned of the riskiness of oversimplification and understatement in an age of advertising.

For his least favourable critics have borrowed a good part of his representation of himself, even parroting certain phrases and epithets, belittlingly, and to the advantage of their preferred school of modern writing, whatever it may be. In their aggressiveness, his defence position has been turned around; as if it were some bit of Maginot Line with forces of the enemy established in it by mischance or by mistake. The confusion is great, *quid pro quo*; and those who disapprove of his come at one so, in the regular uniform of his thought turned inside out, and with the passwords—writing is a livelihood, fiction is a pastime, the mixture as before—that one often feels obliged to fight him too, before one can give him his due praise.

Some people of course are real believers in unpopularity, mistrusters of success; and the recently booming market for whatever bears Maugham's signature, and the adaptations of the motion-picture industry, and all the publicity and the publicising, have made these people disrespectful. His detractors have

him on their minds a good deal, and feel romantically about him in their way, they are anti-fans. In ordinary social intercourse one hears far more talk of any sort of relative failure on his part—when a given novel can be said to have fallen short of the standard set by some previous novel, or perhaps has sold a few hundred thousand copies less—than of the successes of other writers. I may seem sarcastic, but it is not my intention to suggest that the opponents to Maugham are all of a superficial or unreasonable spirit. Certainly they are not. Among my best friends there are three or four whose opinion of authors as a rule tallies with mine, whose cultivation and judgment I appreciate exceedingly, with whom I cannot have a civil conversation about this one author, so zealous or jealous have they become, in their resolve not to have him over-estimated.

But the poor criticism and the captious momentary talk have only increased Maugham's general celebrity, emphasised the unswerving strength of mind in his own way, and given further advertisement to his tranquil, uninfluenced, unceasing production. The fact is that the anti-Maugham party have not really been able to put up a candidate of their own for the specific position in contemporary letters—the combined artistic and popular position—which they are so impatient of his continuing to hold, decade after decade. All these years they seem never to have found themselves in agreement with the great public about any contemporary writer, nor succeeded in bringing the collectivity around to the style of writing they do care for.

Now here let me cast my vote with the majority, for Maugham, beginning with a general statement of admiration, a profession of faith. I believe that his best books, perhaps eight or ten volumes, are better than almost anyone's today, and will endure for posterity. Except for the extreme jeopardies facing Western civilization as a whole, I feel no uneasiness whatever about his having his sufficient fame in the outcome of the century; his share of what is called, in rather old-fashioned writer's parlance, immortality.

In the meantime a really considerable slump of his reputation is to be expected; something more than the restlessness against him in literary society and the carping of professional critics. It

is normal, melancholy though it must be for any author who has lived to see it. Presently, a great many of those who for years have delighted in him above all other storytellers, will have had their fill, and they will forget to recommend him to the younger generation. Already his imitators have somewhat coarsened and debased the forms and devices of his fiction, so that one looks upon certain of the beauties of it with a dull, dissipated eye; he no longer gets credit for uniqueness.

And meanwhile his successors, it is to be hoped—those who are not too idle or freakish or unfortunate—have been getting ready with some new type or types of literature to suit themselves, with departures from his way of writing, refutations of his way of thinking. In subject-matter especially there must always be some frontier opening up: new ruling passions in the ascendant, and up-to-date strengths of mind and weaknesses of character which Maugham in old age could not be expected to understand very well; which his perfected forms and practiced techniques would not suit if he did. Concepts of what is desirable in life, and what is hateful or insufferable, differing radically from those he has exemplified in a hundred various tales and indeed in his own life-story. . .

Do I make him seem older than he is in fact? He is not one of those stubborn fighters against mortality, not a muscular, sanguine, egotistical man; and he has felt his age. Since he is still manifestly enjoying life, we might scarcely think of it except for his own reminders. When he was only sixty-four he gave it as one of his reasons for writing *The Summing Up* with no further postponement; and again and again he has returned to the solemn theme, the note of farewell. I think this is a trait of literary artists, perhaps of all artists; and as work of art does actually offer the possibility of a kind and degree of survival after death, it is apt to lead to some imagination of the time far ahead. My impression is that Mr. Maugham often wonders how posterity will regard his career and collected works, though I am sure he would never speak of it.

With praise of him by serious critics so insufficient in these last decades of his life (a mountain of clippings indeed, but more than half of it quibbling, unimpressed, or unenlightened) and

the word-of-mouth of the intellectuals so little in unison, likely to make only a weak, jangled reverberation in the period to come, and no very remarkable record of official or academic honours, for he has not been greatly indulged in this way either—what is going to lead the good reader of posterity to take the trouble of procuring his books and to try reading them? Curiosity, I suppose, above all. What made this man so beloved by the unliterary, unofficial, unacademic humanity of his time? and as it has been a crucial historic time, what can his popularity have signified, and what good or harm was there in it? So few contemporary men of letters have kept their public for three decades, with a continuous production and increasing sale of books the while; attention will be attracted to him by this. He will be part of a history lesson.

And when it comes to reading for pleasure or for any personal emotion or edification, he will not have, in (let us say) the middle of the twenty-first century, all the competition that appears at present. A quantity of literature, especially fiction, vanishes in thin air. Some of the work of famed contemporaries of his has already been shelved; and in almost all of it we can see the ephemeral and perishable elements. Any little random enumeration and review of them is suggestive of the relative soundness of his narrative art, indicative of its greater staying-power. In the various ways in which they have proved weak, he took the trouble to develop particular strength. The mistakes they made, the predilections in which they indulged: these were what he most severely forbade himself and guarded against. I gather that in his formative years he studied everything they were doing; then considered, in his reading of all the still valid fiction of the past, every sort of parallel; and carried the lesson forward in speculation upon the future; and regularly applied it to his day's work—most earnestly desiring not to have written in vain.

Wells, for example, so hard-working and serious, so influential for many years, wrote like a newspaper; and since he rashly prophesied things in every volume, what he got right will seem platitudinous, and what he got wrong, absurd. At the other extreme, the truly artistic fiction of the period has been characterised by a certain remoteness of subject-matter, elusive and

allusive; and obscured by linguistic innovations, a playing with words, like poetry. It is hard to foresee how so luxurious a fabric of writing will endure; there is not much precedent in literary history. Half the work of wonderful Joyce surely will revert to the universities, recondite crossword puzzles. Not a learned type of reader myself, I feel that the best novels of Ford Madox Ford and Maurice Baring might be appreciated if they were read at all; but they are likely to be overlooked, their careers in their lifetime having gone so modestly. As I remarked just now, there is more than a pecuniary advantage in having sold large quantities; readers long afterward wonder why. E. M. Forster will certainly last; only five novels, and (what a mystery it is) none at all since 1924!

Thus very naturally, with so little early twentieth-century literature that will still seem readable, the wondering future reader will turn to the wide shelf-ful of the collected works of Maugham; the one of all his generation the least like a genius, the one most emphatically disavowing any such pretension. Down out of the attic of literary history his narrative art will be brought, as though it were some piece of inherited furniture that had gone out of fashion for a time; comfortably functional, solidly constructed, with not much gilt on it but finely carved.

And the use and the enjoyment of reading him many years hence, I believe, will not be very different from our own at present—precisely because he has been sagacious and cautious in his handling of themes of the day which grow commonplace or obscure; because he has been content to write a pure prosaic prose without any remarkable invention of new ways of expressing things; because he has written a great amount, so as to constitute a distinct Maugham-world into which his readers can enter, of which they can learn the idiom and the implications, each volume helping them to understand the next; and because he has discovered and devised story after story worth telling for the story's sake, the one and only thing he has boasted of himself. The love of narration as such evidently is elemental and permanent in human nature.

If you have been following Maugham's own line about his work too ingenuously, or reading the current criticism with entire



respect, you may have assumed that it is, if not altogether thoughtless, of a very limited intellectual interest. Now I will dispute this, and give you some illustration and analysis of the kind of thought I find in his fiction, or (as I suppose Mr. Maugham would prefer to have me say) the kind of meaning I read into it.

Without exaggeration, I maintain only that in all his best stories and novels there is an underlying, somewhat hidden significance, pervasive spiritual sense, and important moral counsel, and general view of life and vision of the present world—supplementary to that sole purpose of entertainment continually announced by him—which will repay whatever trouble of intellect you may take in your reading. You will be the wiser for it. Presumably he is not aware of all that he puts in a work of fiction; but I feel sure that he is always conscious of more than he cares to talk about.

In his lifetime he has had an extraordinary range of experience of the world, often in contact with great personages of his generation, sometimes concerned with historic events. Also year after year all sorts of persons, struck by the tolerant spirit and sagacity of his writing, have kept bringing him their report or confession of those extreme occurrences of private life in which modern human nature so often strangely manifests itself, unveils itself. He has a reading and speaking knowledge of five languages, and has read everything, including all the classics of religion and metaphysics, studiously. He is the most serious of men, seeking the general truth in all things, holding himself responsible for his every belief or disbelief, never fooling himself or others, thinking hard. It would be odd indeed if his production of books, even unpretentious stories, were as light-weight as the common estimation has it.

To be sure, he has a strict sense of the different literary forms, putting limitations upon his content in each of them accordingly. Not only *The Summing Up* but various other volumes of non-fiction have been somewhat in the vein of autobiography, therefore not appropriate for any display of intellect as an end in itself. In many a story he has made use of the first person

singular; and then, quite as modestly as though it were reminiscence or truthful expository writing, he has allowed himself only that extent of thoughtfulness, intelligence rather than intellect, which could be referred to his own character, within plausible radius of himself. In a novel of course there is always something or other subject to interpretation in terms of economics and the social sciences, psychology and so on. But he has kept all this somewhat out of evidence, according to his dear tenets of simplicity and clarity; in any case kept it out of vocabulary.

Some readers depend a great deal on verbal associations and style in general as indications of seriousness of thought: massive abstruse specialised words, and complicatedness and elaboration in other ways as well, and a mysterious solemnity. There is never anything like that in Maugham. He irately disapproves of it in others' work, even in the writing of technical philosophy and the accounts which scientists give of their research and speculation. Not long ago he took the matter up with certain eminent professors and a biologist or two in person, advocating a less self-indulgent style. In all his mature period his own way of expressing ideas has been direct and plain and pithy, somewhat in emulation of Dryden and Swift and their followers, but with constant observance of the rhythm of informal modern conversation and with some easy colloquialism.

If you are looking for the deep thoughtfulness in a story or a novel by Maugham, you cannot expect to have it underlined for you as such. You must not mistake simplicity for insignificance; and you must learn to recognise his idea in that envelope of reality in which ideas do actually generate, in incident and in dialogue and in little sequences of cause and effect. Also you will need to read fairly slowly, pondering somewhat as you go along, and to bear it all in mind for some time afterward, weighing it against your own experience and ideas and feelings.

If, on the other hand, you are the more natural, easy-minded, unreasoning man, and what you want is the mere spinning of a yarn, now a kind of myth against some exotic background, now a pitiful or exciting experience of low life, now a humorous scene of high life, to pass the time—with perhaps just a little inspiration or revelation incidentally adhering to your mind

when this or that feature of the plot chances to correspond to some recollection or present preoccupation of your own—you have Maugham's explicit blessing. You are the reader he writes for, by his own account.

For my part, I like works of fiction to have meaning, the deeper and the more consequential the better; and unless I find this to my satisfaction, fiction-reading amuses me very little and leaves me discontented. The purest story-form can convey a greater and more accurate truth—as to human nature in its various manifestations and inhibitions, and general human fate of the day and age—than any abstract or generalised literature, dogma or dialectic or deduction of science. The actual perusal of a book is only a part of the literary experience. By mere mechanism of the mind, the time I pass in recalling and reflecting upon what I have read is greater than the time it takes to read. When, with no difficulty or superfluity or prolixity, I have been given something worth thinking about, I love the writing in question, and the writer; this is my chief reason for admiring Maugham.

The thought in Maugham's novels is mostly ethics, religion, or the psychology of creative endeavour. *The Moon and Sixpence*, for example, has to do with the strange compelling destiny of the artist ahead of his time, to whom moral defects, unkindness towards others, even brutality and megalomania, may prove helpful in becoming great; as in the case of Gauguin. *Cakes and Ale*—which I once heard Mr. Maugham himself recommend as his own first choice of his novels—gives a picture of the literary life, with assorted types of men of letters, the celebrity and the young novice, the real creator and the parasitic literary journalist, and others; it also shows the essential goodness of a sexually loose woman, and her benign influence on the men around her. *The Painted Veil* is a portrait of the unhappiness resulting from irresponsible adultery; the beneficial psycho-therapeutic effect of doing good to others; and the appeal of Roman Catholicism when one is unhappy.

To be sure, none of this will greatly impress or entirely satisfy any true intellectual. It is not that absolute learnedness and virtuosity of mind which one has seen exercised in the fiction

of (for example) Thomas Mann, almost as proudly and far-rangingly as in the eclectic philosophy of Santayana or the world-history of Toynbee. On the other hand, what Maugham has to offer is not frivolous matter; and the point of thinking, I take it, is not quantity of thought but rightness, relevance, and indeed helpfulness.

*Christmas Holiday* is unique in Maugham's fiction in that its theme is sociological and political, indeed international. It is the one of his fifteen-odd novels that has meant most to me personally. As you may recall, it is the tale of a happy-natured and fortunate English youngster holidaying in Paris, where he encounters and makes friends with a pathetic Russian-refugee prostitute, who confesses her identity—she is the wife of a notorious murderer—then little by little narrates their love and the circumstances of his evil deed.

Upon its first publication in 1939, so I have been told, the majority of Maugham's readers did not respond with their customary enthusiasm; as though determined to shut their eyes a few more months to what its entire plot and all its characterisations portended. Also those who wrote the criticisms of it missed its grave implications, not stopping to think. Which is no final matter; books of the greatest importance, even masterpieces, even classics, often have had to wait for their high rating and proper interpretation.

Nineteen hundred and thirty-nine, the end of the great lull in modern history; the moment of awakening from the sweetest, most heedless sleep humanity ever indulged in! As of that date, *Christmas Holiday* in my opinion has greater significance than any other contemporary novel. Social significance! The phrase is outworn, I know, but here we have exactly what it was meant for.

Maugham in this slight volume, less than a hundred thousand words long, with his air of having nothing on his mind except his little characters—how they came together and what happened and what they said and how they felt—explains more of the human basis of Fascism and Nazism and Communism than anyone else has done: the self-fascinated, intoxicated, insensible character of all that new leadership in Europe; the womanish passivity of the unhappy masses dependent on it and devoted to

it; the Anglo-Saxon bewilderment in the matter, which still generally prevails; and the seeds of historic evil yet to come, not at all extirpated in World War II but rather multiplied and flung with greater profusion in no less receptive soil farther afield, even beyond Europe. Europe the starting point, the womb and the cradle, as in fact it has been for millenia . . .

I remember that when it first appeared, and my friends were reading it and more or less enjoying it, and I spoke of its dread allegory and prophetic sense, a number of them said they had no idea what I was talking about. A year or so later I brought the subject up in conversation with Mr. Maugham. As a rule he dislikes listening to anyone's opinion of his writing. I think this is not just shyness but also a kind of contrariety. If you quibble with him he wants to fight back, even unfairly, haughtily. The least excess of praise, one the other hand, only stimulates in him that deep and painful discontent of the artist with everything he has done to date, which is one of the important nerve-centres of art. But upon this occasion he did not check me. I outlined all the significance of his book as it appeared to me; I alluded to the various disagreeing or obtuse readers.

Mr. Maugham said, "Certainly I had those things in the back of my mind while I was writing it. But if I had insisted on them I should have spoiled my story. It is not the business of a novelist to tell his readers what they are to think of his characters and his plot. If you want your work of fiction to be read, and you have some point that you wish to make, you must bring it in discreetly. Your reader may not take your meaning, or it may not interest him. You must let him read for his pleasure."

As to the labour of literature Mr. Maugham has said that he was greatly influenced by a fact about Darwin which, at an impressionable age, he read in some book or heard someone tell: Darwin never worked more than three hours a day. Reflecting upon which, the ambitious but reasonable youth came to the conclusion that if, at this rate of endeavour, biological science could be revolutionised and a great deal of the ideology and the ethics of the century altered, surely he could earn a sufficient living and make a name for himself as a playwright and story-teller and novelist with as little drudgery.

A wilful man, he seems to have persisted in this as well as other plans of those early days. At his present time of life he rouses from sleep at dawn or soon after; but he brings no manuscript or even notebook into the bedroom, and does not go to his writing room until he has read a while and breakfasted at leisure. Just before one o'clock he steps into the living room, ready for his cocktail and lunch; pleased with himself if the work has gone forward, clear in his conscience anyway. Approximately Darwin's three hours . . .

But in order not to set him up as a dangerous example to any ambitious but lazy literary youngster—and not to give aid and comfort to those of the intelligentsia who maintain that he has had it easy, and all his renown is but good luck—I will give a little more information. Week in and week out, year after year, in whatever circumstances—though surrounded by frivolity, though assailed by bothers and anxieties, and touched upon occasion as all men are by exceeding affection or pity or self-pity or anger—regularly every morning he goes to his desk and labours at his writing. For months at a time he will not skip a day. One day I did see him in the living room before lunch, grumpily seated by the fireplace; he had a bad toothache, and even then he was engrossed in a heavy laborious tome, preparatory to the composition of something theological or historical.

Indeed in his middle life he made some voyage every year or so, notably to the Orient and around the South Seas, in what must have seemed a carefree manner. But think of the cargo of fiction he brought back upon each return voyage! He was not wasting his time. Today that spirit of travel for travel's sake (and story's sake) has calmed down in him. But I have observed that even in the city with details of publishing or other commitments of his career to attend to, also when he takes vacations in the summer or weekends with friends—except when actually in transit, in the train or in the plane—regularly almost every morning he goes to some desk or substitute table and works awhile.

This is not drudgery, I know, but it is something that for my part I should find harder to endure and sustain: control, inner tension, and in fact, faith, and faith in oneself—and I dare say it is more to the purpose of literature ultimately than that way

of pent-up ambition occasionally overflowing, rushing, making up for lost time, which gives one the feeling of being a genius, or that way of desperate engagement and deadline with stimulants and sedatives, which is the habit of so many contemporary authors.

Furthermore, in Maugham's case, the time he spends at his desk is only a part of the labour. All his stories and novels have been worked out in his mind before he ever takes his neat pen in hand. Someone has told him an incident of real life, perhaps no more than an impressive utterance or gesture at some crucial moment. That is the commencement, as it were the grain of sand in the bivalve. But real life never seems to him as good as imagination, at least not as good to write about. Therefore he ponders, and sometimes years pass before he is able to devise the fulfilment and change, the different ending, the super-structure of moral implication, which will make all the difference between reality and art. Then he begins searching for the bits and pieces of everyone he has ever known which can be moulded into fictitious beings capable of doing or experiencing whatever it is that he has to tell; adding subordinate episodes as they may enhance or clarify the main matter, and drawing all into one unit; regulating whatever faults of implausibility or contradiction may develop; and deciding upon the order of narration most natural to it, most effective for it. All this goes on in his head; not in Darwin's three hours but in the other twenty-one, when he rouses too early in the morning, when he sits by the fire, when he is taking short salubrious walks . . .

There is a page in his memoir of the beginning of World War II, *Strictly Personal*, bearing upon this matter of the advance preparation of his fiction. In the disaster of France he was in personal peril; the Germans having learned from his volume of stories entitled *Ashenden* that he had served as a secret agent in World War I. As he was escaping to England on a miserable coal-boat, seated with fellow-passengers on the deck—as a kindness to them, to pass the deadly tedium and to relieve their collective fear and shock and loss—he told them stories. He began with some which he was in the habit of telling, which he had learned to rely on to amuse people. But he ran through his repertory of these

little set-pieces; and so he went on and gave his unhappy audience the benefit of certain plots and projects of fiction which he had borne in mind through the years, and never been willing to tell, lest the bloom of his own interest in them be worn off before they were ready to be written. The reason for his willingness, then and there, on the vessel of refuge, was the shadow of death hanging over them, environing them. They expected to encounter a submarine or perhaps a flight of predatory planes; therefore the aged story-teller felt that he could spare some of his fondly hoarded material. Even in the event of a safe homecoming, he fancied, he would not live to cope with it all.

This must be the most interesting and individual aspect of his vocation of letters and his career; his planning and planning, major matters and minor matters alike; his constant looking ahead and budgeting every faculty and every opportunity, with due unflattering consideration of the probabilities for and against him; his sense of significance and a form in the story of his life, beginning and middle and end, as definite as in the construction of any three-act play or short story or shapely short novel; and his constant thought of death, the indelible *finis* on the unfinishable page.

Even in his reading of the works of other men, I have noticed that he keeps to a sort of schedule. Detective stories are to kill time when he is sleepless or in some pain. Novels that friends have sent him can be sufficiently perused, in kindness and out of curiosity, in half-hours of relaxation. Usually he devotes an hour in the afternoon or evening to re-reading one of the classics of fiction, Goethe, Fielding, Cervantes, and the rest; and he keeps certain volumes which mean a great deal to him on his night-table, against the difficult hour of daybreak.

As to the great old masters of fiction, remember that it has always been his hope and intention that the best of his books should entitle him to some place in their hierarchy of world-fame and centennial duration; though a modest place. His requirement of himself has never changed in fifty or more years: perhaps not to be great, but to be good, according to the proposition of their greatness. They are the objects of his devotion, as it were the inspiring and interceding saints. Also each



of them is exemplary to him in some particular of the art; and he still constantly turns to them when he has come upon any little problem of his own writing, to consider what solution one or the other may have found in a parallel case. When anything in his work in progress has reference to a learned or abstract matter, he researches tirelessly. He has been known to study as many as forty volumes for one short and easily readable chapter.

Naturally, as a fiction-writer, his principal research is just coming to know people, getting them to tell him what they have experienced, probing their minds, observing their emotions and their morals. In this he has been tireless, too; also patient and relentless, teasing and combative and kind—whatever the human instance may call for—and nothing that does not infringe upon the Darwinian hours seems to him too much trouble; not a detail of humanity is too small for his acute and impartial eye. Often as he goes out to dine he has a question ready to put to someone he expects to meet; the answer to which will fit into the morrow's page.

He is, as nearly as can be, a single-minded man. Some years ago he confided to a friend that, within his remembrance, he had never gone anywhere or cared to have any new person introduced to him—except for one of his diversions, bridge-playing, for example—or pursued a particular acquaintance with anyone, unless he had some idea of a function or utility for his literary art in so doing: some study of the narratable world up to date; or a search for types of humanity, in the way of a painter needing models to pose for him; or a glimpse into strange ways of living; or an experimental discussion of ideas important to him with reference to work in progress.

Naturally the friend, upon hearing this, felt a pang of self-consciousness, a little chill; but later on he remarked that of his observation over a period of years, he believed it to be true enough. In appreciation of his friendship in the time he spent in America during World War II let me say that I think it is no longer true. Every sort of ulterior motive and craft and documentary sense seems to have waned out of his various human interests. His kindness toward young people has a character of benign,

humorous fatherliness, without any very intense urge to understand them. In society he seeks especially those who can tell him of philosophy and religion. Once in a while he recognises new subject matter as such, when he hears of it or comes upon it, and points out to some young writer its interest and feasibility, and the proper way to handle it. But even more certainly than on the perilous refugee boat he reminds himself that there will not be time for it to rise and swell in his mind, to ripen for his neat final manuscript and printed best-selling page. He makes way for us, he leaves it to us, with his blessing; but also with a certain challenging, sardonic, mistrustful sense. He is easy to please but not easy to satisfy.

Let us not have, in praise of a man so realistic and judicious, any mixing of the classifications of men or any sentimentality. He is not a saint or a sage or a hero; only a true and greatly accomplished literary artist. But neither let us forget that art has its virtues, and they are rewarded in more ways than one. I remember that one day he came in from his writing room, visibly happy—with a light step, the strong downward expression of his mouth softened, his eyes in their delicate criss-cross wrinkles perfectly clear—and remarked: "I will tell you, as it may not have occurred to you, there is a particular drawback in the career of writing."

Upon our inquiring what the drawback was, he answered, "When you have finished the day's work, and you have to take your leisure and wait for your creative gift to be restored next morning, anything you can do in the remaining hours of the day seems a little pale and flat."

To have commenced literature half a century ago, and still, in spite of life—and by life I mean disillusionment and unlucky affections, increase of pain and worldly losses, shames and imperfections of human nature, along with horrible war and civil war, and the ruin of nations, and the failure of a whole structure of delectable usages—still to enjoy writing so much that nothing compares with it, and to write to the end, is a grand and enviable thing, and a spiritual thing. There are a number of good reasons for dedicating oneself to the art of writing; surely this is as good as any.

## APPENDIX

### A NOTE ON MAUGHAM COLLECTIONS

By Klaus W. Jonas

Few writers have distributed their manuscripts over so wide an area as has W. Somerset Maugham, whose original works are to be found in three countries, each of which has served as his residence for many years: France, England, and the United States of America. Of all these collections, by far the largest one is that of the author himself, located in his home at Villa Mauresque. Though his interests as a collector are not primarily rare books, and least of all his own, but chiefly paintings, his is an unparalleled assemblage of manuscripts, first editions, associated items and correspondence with literary men, artists and politicians. This is the more surprising as he has given away so many of his manuscripts to libraries, universities, friends and relatives while others have been lost as a result of the war. The original manuscripts of at least eleven of his published books and a great many smaller items are in his home,<sup>1</sup> while those of nine books were destroyed<sup>2</sup> and one was stolen.<sup>3</sup> Also in the villa is a small but highly selective collection belonging to Alan Searle, Maugham's secretary. Among his holdings are not only a good many autographed first editions but also one major manuscript: *Ten Novelists and their Novels*, a gift from the author to his most loyal friend and companion.

While no research library in France has specialised in collecting Maughamiana, important items are in possession of Professor Paul Dottin, President of the University of Toulouse. As one of the first French scholars to work on Mr. Maugham, Dottin received in the twenties many handwritten letters from the author, often from places "East of Suez," and although still a private collection,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Hero, The Merry-Go-Round, The Painted Veil, Ashenden, First Person Singular, Don Fernando, Up at the Villa, Then and Now, Creatures of Circumstance.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Land of the Blessed Virgin, The Bishop's Apron, The Explorer, The Magician, Books and You, France at War, The Hour before the Dawn, A Man of Honour, Lady Frederick.*

<sup>3</sup> *Our Betters.*

it is to be hoped that some day they may become available to the researcher.

In England, Maugham is, of course, one of the most widely collected modern authors, but most of the materials are in private hands and thus not accessible for the time being. Probably the most comprehensive and valuable of these collections was that formed by his old friend Sir Gerald Kelly which existed until December 1955, when it was sold at auction by Sotheby and thus broken up and acquired by a great many individual collectors. Among its printed materials were some fifty presentation copies of first editions, including one of the first issue of *The Painted Veil*, which bore the following autograph note on the fly-leaf: "This is the edition that was withdrawn on the eve of publication because the Assistant Colonial Secretary at Hong Kong threatened to bring an action for libel; the name of the Colony was changed to an imaginary one and a number of pages were re-set before the book was finally issued."

There are other friends and relatives of the author to whom he has presented manuscripts but their holdings generally do not amount to collections. To his daughter, Lady John Hope, Maugham has given the originals of *The Casuarina Tree* and *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, to his nephew Robin, the present Lord Maugham, his favourite novel, *Cakes and Ale*. Other recipients were his friends Mrs. Robert Tritton (who owns the manuscript of his essay on Jane Austen), Miss Sally Ryan (the second section of *A Writer's Notebook*), and Alexander S. Frere, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Wm. Heinemann (*Mrs. Craddock*).

Finally there are a number of institutions and libraries which have received from the author manuscript materials of great importance: to the National Theatre he presented twenty-one of his plays,<sup>1</sup> to the British Museum the autograph manuscript of *The Summing Up*, to the Red Cross the manuscripts of *The Judgement Seat*, *Cosmopolitans*, and *Christmas Holiday*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Loaves and Fishes*, *Mrs. Dot*, *Jack Straw*, *The Explorer*, *Penelope*, *Smith*, *The Tenth Man*, *Landed Gentry*, *The Land of Promise*, *The Unattainable*, *Home and Beauty*, *The Unknown*, *Caesar's Wife*, *The Circle*, *East of Suez*, *The Letter*, *The Constant Wife*, *The Sacred Flame*, *The Breadwinner*, *For Services Rendered*, *Sheppey*.

Maugham also made a contribution to the library of the Queen's Dolls House at Windsor Castle: the original manuscript of his charming children's story "The Princess and the Nightingale" which, along with the rest of the Dolls House, was presented to Her late Majesty Queen Mary in 1924.

Contrary to what readers of *Of Human Bondage* might expect, Maugham has professed a deep and lasting attachment to King's School, Canterbury, and on November 11, 1948, presented to it in person the manuscripts of his first and his last novels, which are now in the Walpole Collection. In 1937 Hugh Walpole had handed his collection of original manuscripts of famous authors and of rare printed books over to the School, and occasional additions have been made ever since. Maugham's first novel written as a medical student in London into three French exercise books and originally entitled *A Lambeth Idyll* by William Somerset, shows amazingly few alterations and cancellations in the text, at least for a writer of only twenty-two. The same is true of the manuscript of his last novel, *Catalina*, finished on January 28, 1947. As has been his custom in the past thirty-odd years, corrections and additions were made in red ink, and its 381 quarto pages are now handsomely bound in blue morocco.

While the great university libraries at Oxford and Cambridge contain most of Maugham's works in English, numerous translations and excellent holdings of critical materials, neither of them appears to possess any of his manuscripts.

For the scholar, therefore, who is anxious to compare his original writings with the published versions of his books, the U.S.A. has become more and more important in the past sixteen years. Most of its vast collections are open to the student of literature, and to explore their holdings is not only a fascinating but a highly rewarding task as well.

"A year or two ago I was invited to give a lecture at a great and ancient university and for reasons with which I need not trouble you I chose the somewhat grim topic of political obligation. I knew exactly what I wanted to say and went into the lecture hall without even a note. It was crowded to the doors. I think I got through the lecture pretty well and reached my peroration without mishap. But having been at one time of my life a dramatist I have been inclined

to end a discourse with a curtain line. Well, I reached my curtain line with a sigh of relief and began very confidently: The price of liberty is . . . and then I had a complete black-out and could not for the life of me remember what the price of liberty was.

It brought my lecture to a humiliating conclusion and, unless in the interval someone else has told them, the students of that great and ancient university do not to this day know what the price of liberty is."

Thus wrote William Somerset Maugham in 1946 in a booklet entitled *Of Human Bondage; with a Digression on the Art of Fiction*, delivered originally as a lecture in the Coolidge Auditorium of the Library of Congress. And the incident described above had made such a lasting impression on him that, thirteen years later, Maugham was able to give me a detailed oral account of it during a visit with him at Cap Ferrat. It had taken place on November 9, 1942, when he gave the Francis Bergen Memorial Lecture on democracy at Strathcona Hall. Though his stay in New Haven had been brief, its consequences were of far-reaching importance for the Yale University Library.

The man responsible for arranging the lecture and bringing Maugham to Yale was the late Professor William Lyon Phelps. During the Second World War, the four years of which Maugham spent in America, their acquaintance developed into a close friendship. It had started when Phelps read in one of Maugham's short stories about the Far East that "white men really know nothing about the thoughts of Orientals;" this remark had kindled his interest in the problem of East and West with which Maugham has dealt in many of his works. The first letter I have been able to trace is dated May 21, 1936:

"Dear Professor Phelps:

Thank you for sending me your brief article. The answer to your final question—do the dark-skinned men see right through us?—is no. I am convinced of that. Do you think I, who was born in France and have lived here for years, know a Frenchman as a Frenchman knows him? Not for a minute.

Yours sincerely,

W. S. Maugham."

I found no further letters until this one, written on September

24, 1942, when Maugham was preparing his lecture at Yale:

"Dear Billy:

Thinking you may want them I am returning the clippings. It must have been a great discourse. What fun you and Dreiser do have! Re the Pollock book, I suppose I have made a mistake. I had the impression that he had published a little text book called 'Political Obligation' which was read by Undergraduates at Cambridge; but it is forty years since I read it and it may be that it was called 'The Science of Politics.' Please don't bother to send me that as I can get it at the Library in 42nd Street. I promised to send a manuscript to the Librarian of your University on my return to New York, but I have mislaid [!] his letter and cannot remember his name. Would your niece send it to me?

Yours affectionately,  
Willie."

Several months after Maugham's visit to Yale, Professor Phelps was taken seriously ill. Maugham, who was residing at the time in the Ritz Carlton Hotel in New York, wrote him:

"Dear Billy:

I am so terribly sorry to see in the papers that you are sick abed in hospital. I hope that with your wonderful vitality and your iron constitution you will soon be well again, but I should be grateful if your niece would drop me a line to tell me how you are.

I am on the point of leaving for Edgartown and do not expect to be back in New York till the middle of September.

Yours affectionately,  
Willie."

Maugham's relations with Phelps were always very cordial, and through him he developed a deep and lasting interest in the Yale University Library. After Phelps's death in August 1943 Somerset Maugham, together with Wilbur L. Cross, Edna Ferber, John Kieran, and Chauncey Brewster Tinker, served on a committee sponsoring the establishment of the William Lyon Phelps Memorial Fund for the purchase of the type of books in which Phelps was most interested.

The collections in the Sterling Memorial Library so impressed Maugham that he himself wished to add to them, and in December 1942 he presented to the Library the holograph manuscript of *Strictly Personal*, an account of his adventures before and

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during his escape from the French Riviera in 1940. The manuscript, consisting of 157 numbered leaves, is interesting to students of Maugham's craftsmanship as it bears numerous autograph corrections and deletions in his hand.

Apart from the Library of Congress, Yale University is the only institution in America which has received more than one major gift from Mr. Maugham. In a letter dated April 27, 1954, he wrote to Donald G. Wing:

"I must ask you to forgive me if I have delayed to answer your letter. My eightieth birthday brought me over two thousand letters, and they are still coming in.

The Yale University Library has a manuscript of mine. It is a series of essays I published under the title 'Strictly Personal.' But this is not a manuscript of any consequence, and I have long wished to present the University of Yale with something slightly more important. Your letter has come rather late in the day because most of my manuscripts have already been distributed to the British Museum, the Bodleian Library, the Library of Congress, the Pierpoint [sic] Morgan Library and so forth. I will see what I have left, and when I am a little less rushed, let you have any suggestions I may be able to make."

On October 22 of the same year, Maugham sent his second gift to the Library, together with a letter addressed to Mr. Wing:

"I am sending you for your Library the manuscript of a book called 'On a Chinese Screen' which I have always had a predilection for. It was written as a result of a long stay in China in 1920. I notice the manuscript hasn't got the preface I wrote when these notes of mine were eventually published, and I suppose I wrote that separately."

The history of the Maugham Collection at Yale goes back to 1939. On May 4 of that year, the Library became the recipient of the valuable collection of Maughamiana assembled over a period of eight years by Colonel Thomas E. Marston, now Curator of Classics in the Rare Book Room. It consisted of thirty-four first editions of Maugham's works, most of which were autographed by Mr. Maugham on his visit to Yale in 1942; manuscript letters addressed to Miss Morse, secretary of the late George H. Doran, Maugham's former publisher; royalty agreements, and a number of proof sheets.

In 1947 the collection was strengthened through a gift from



Lt. Comm. Halstead VanderPoel who presented to the Library autograph and typewritten letters by Maugham to various literary agents such as William Morris Colles, John W. Rumsey, and Charles H. Towne, and in 1951 he gave the typescript of *Ashenden* with manuscript autograph corrections.

The latest additions worthy of special mention were part of two larger collections of autograph letters from various English and American writers. One of them was given to the Yale Library by Philip D. Sang of Chicago, the other was acquired from the estate of the late William Lyon Phelps. Among the former there were thirty-eight autograph letters and one autograph post card written by Maugham between 1908 and 1910 to Mrs. Ada Levenson of London, while the latter contained sixteen autograph and ten typed letters of Mr. Maugham addressed to Mr. Phelps.<sup>1</sup>

The Maugham Collection at Yale ranks among the major archives for the study of Mr. Maugham in the U.S.A. and its large file of correspondence is unrivalled in extent. It is surpassed, so far as I could determine, by only one American library in its holdings of important manuscript material and critical literature: the Library of Congress.

Whereas the Yale University Library was the first one in the U.S.A. to become the recipient of an original Maugham manuscript, it was the national library in Washington which received the manuscript of his most important book. On April 20, 1946, Maugham presented to the people of the United States the holograph manuscript of his novel *Of Human Bondage*, which had been eagerly sought by collectors for many years. It fills some sixteen medium-sized notebooks containing, in addition to the text, copious emendations and annotations in Maugham's hand. Maugham made this gift as a token of Anglo-American friendship and as a mark of appreciation of the hospitality of the American people which he, his daughter and grandchildren had received in the States during the war. In accepting the manuscript, Dr. Luther Evans called this "an act of generosity and friendship and confidence which, because it is unique, surpasses

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<sup>1</sup> These, as well as the above-quoted letters from Mr. Maugham to William Lyon Phelps, are now in the Yale Collection of American Literature, of which Donald C. Gallup is Curator.

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any borrowed expressions of acknowledgement and appreciation."

Five years later, on October 11, 1951, the Library of Congress held a luncheon in Maugham's honour, and on this occasion he presented it with the original manuscript of *The Artistic Temperament of Stephen Carey*, the first and rejected version of *Of Human Bondage*, written in 1897 during a six-month stay in Seville. The Librarian, in receiving this gift, spoke of the "undisguised avarice with which he had long regarded it," and his pleasure in the possession of the "aboriginal ancestor" of a classic. He expressed the hope that Mr. Maugham would one day remit the harsh condition that *Stephen Carey* must never be published in whole or in part. In his reply, Mr. Maugham remarked that, if, in the future, there are still those who read *Of Human Bondage*, and if, in that unlikely contingency, a professor should be disposed to write an article about it for an academic journal, his own shade would not be tormented if the learned man alluded to the fact that he had read Stephen's story. He was confident, however, that the reference would mention the immaturity of the earlier draft and would contain some derisive speculations as to why it had ever been preserved. In his remarks at the luncheon, Mr. Maugham also mentioned that if the Library of Congress had not been willing to accept the manuscript, he would have destroyed it.

All students of literature and, in particular, of Mr. Maugham's works will find the collection in the Library of Congress of great scholarly importance and will be grateful to Mr. Maugham for his generosity in making that library the permanent home of three manuscripts, which are probably nearer to his heart than any others.

The Library of Congress also possesses several autograph letters, all of them, interestingly enough, relating to a possible sale of his manuscripts. On October 8, 1934, Maugham wrote from his home at Cap Ferrat to Mr. Henry Schuman of New York:

"I waited to answer your first letter, because I understood that there was little chance of getting anyone interested in

my manuscripts while the economic situation in America was so uncertain.

I am proposing to come over in the autumn of next year and my impression is that the times then will be more favourable. Some time ago I made a list of my manuscripts amounting in all to fifty items and including not only *Of Human Bondage* but a version of the same novel that I wrote about fifteen years before but never published. I have long wished to found a prize to enable young literary men to travel and so improve their work and I have been hoping to sell my manuscripts for fifty thousand dollars and thus enable myself to do this. It does not seem to me an extravagant price for fifty items and I should have thought a dealer buying them could by selling them separately make a handsome profit for himself. But the best sum I have been offered so far for the whole lot is seven thousand and five hundred pounds and so it seems to me it would probably be better for me to attempt to dispose of the items separately. I have had three thousand five hundred pounds offered me for the two versions of *Of Human Bondage*."

A short time later, on November 5 of the same year, Mr. Maugham wrote to Mr. Schuman:

"Dear Mr. Schuman:

Thank you for your letter. As soon as I get home I will send you a detailed list of the manuscripts. You can have exclusive rights to dispose of them for six months from your receipt of the list if you like.

I should not like the fact published that I want to found a prize with the money. I do not think that would look very pretty.

Yours sincerely,  
W. S. Maugham."

The third letter in the Library of Congress regarding the sale of his manuscripts was written in Los Angeles, July 22, 1941, to Dr. Jacob Schwartz, the dealer.

"Dear Dr. Schwartz:

I would gladly sell my manuscripts, but in the first place they are unobtainable at the moment, and I am not sure that I shall ever see any of them again except *Of Human Bondage* which happens to be in a London Bank; and secondly the prices of such things are just now at their lowest and I cannot imagine that I could [!] a decent offer.

Yours sincerely,  
W. S. Maugham."

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A few autograph and typewritten letters, dating from 1910 through 1936, are in the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Four of them, written to Eliot Norton and to Miss Norton of Boston, came to Harvard as part of the Norton Papers. These letters date back to Maugham's first visit to the United States in 1910 and show his gratitude to the family which did much to make his stay in America enjoyable, as long as it lasted. The general election in England, however, with the consequent disorganisation of theatrical business, had forced him at that time to cut his visit short. Maugham was especially appreciative of the kindness of Miss Norton, that "very delightful, amusing old lady, who gave me the opportunity of a long conversation with Henry James."

One of the letters at Harvard, addressed to Edgar H. Wells and dated January 14 [1932], also concerns the possible sale of his manuscripts:

"I have been making enquiries about *Of Human Bondage* and I hear at the present moment it would be impossible to get more than five to ten thousand dollars for it, but that if I wait a few years I ought to get at least twenty-five thousand. Under these circumstances I think you will agree that it is useless to get into the matter further until the general situation improves."

In addition to the Yale University Library and the Library of Congress, there are two other American libraries to which Maugham presented original manuscripts even though they have no special collections of his writings: on October 23, 1951, he was honoured at a dinner given by the Fellows of the Pierpont Morgan Library. On this occasion he gave not only an entertaining and informative talk but the original manuscript of *Ah King* as well. The importance of this generous gift is described by Mr. Frederick B. Adams in his *Report to the Fellows* for the year 1951:

"So few contemporary authors compose their manuscripts in longhand that the library of the future may have to be content with original typescripts to represent the principal modern writers. We are fortunate that so able a teller of tales as W. Somerset Maugham is not a devotee of the machine, that his autograph manuscripts are both legible and carefully wrought, and that he has presented one of them to the

Library . . . This [manuscript] contains some of his most enduring short stories, written with that straightforward clarity that is characteristic of his style. It all seems simple, until you inspect the manuscript and see the words and incidents that Mr. Maugham has changed, rearranged, or discarded. Then the labour required, even of an old hand, becomes apparent, and the mysterious process of literary creation stands documented, but not revealed."

In January 1954, Maugham presented to the Princeton University Library the original manuscript of his novel *Theatre*, the story of the life of a brilliant actress on the London stage, written in 1936 and published the following year. The manuscript which is simply bound in black leather, with its title and the name of the author stamped in gold on the front cover, is entirely in Maugham's hand, written in blue ink with the author's corrections in red. Extensive revisions written on the blank reverse sides of the leaves increase considerably the actual amount of manuscript content beyond that indicated by the count of the numbered leaves themselves. Arrangements for acquiring the manuscript had been made by Frederick W. Frost, Princeton '32, a friend of the author and a collector of his works.

The third major collection of Maughamiana in America is that of the New York Public Library. Its Manuscript Division possesses twenty-three letters to Charles Hanson Towne, his former literary agent in New York, written between 1926 and 1946, in which Maugham discusses his own and Towne's writings and plans for future work and travel. There are also, as part of the Van Vechten Collection, several interesting letters from Maugham to Carl Van Vechten, concerning particularly his books *The Tattooed Countess*, *Red*, and *Firecrackers*. Finally, the Berg Collection owns about thirty volumes of Maugham's work, most of them first editions and most of them inscribed to Mr. Van Vechten. There are also autograph letters to William Morris Colles and eighteen autograph and typewritten letters and postcards to Carl Van Vechten, many of them praising his achievements as a writer and a photographer. It is a well-known fact that Maugham has always been a great traveller, and thus it is not surprising that these letters come from all over the world: Hue in Annam, and Calcutta; Habana and Bad Gastein, Austria;

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Port-au-Prince and Capri; Guatemala City and San Francisco, and many, many other places.<sup>1</sup>

While the student of Maugham would wish to consult all of these libraries, there are, of course, many private archives assembled by individual collectors. They are not, at this time, accessible for research purposes, but in a survey such as this, mention should be made of at least some of the treasures acquired by Maugham's American friends or presented to them by the author himself. A few of these collectors have already intimated that their materials will eventually go to one or the other research library.

Most of the private archives in the U.S.A. appear to have been made by intimate friends of the author. Pre-eminent among them are the collections of Messrs. Alanson, Cordell, Pfeiffer, and Zipkin.

The first one in the United States ever to receive an original manuscript from Mr. Maugham was his friend Bertram E. Alanson of San Francisco. Maugham first met him in 1916 when he was sailing from Los Angeles to Honolulu. Mr. Alanson was a fellow-passenger and they spent much time together. Maugham went to Samoa and on his return to America saw Alanson in San Francisco on landing. So began a friendship which has lasted for over forty years. Maugham frankly admits that he owes him a great deal, and he gave Alanson the manuscript of *The Trembling of a Leaf* on his first visit with his wife, now no longer living, at Villa Mauresque, Cap Ferrat. "No one," says Maugham, "could have been a more devoted, generous, considerate friend than dear Bert." Alanson's collection is rich in presentation copies of first editions, critical literature, biography, and memorabilia, and its owner has shown much interest and kindness to this writer in his task of collecting every single item concerning Mr. Maugham and compiling a definitive bibliography of Maugham criticism.

On the occasion of Maugham's eighty-third birthday, in

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<sup>1</sup> In the above-mentioned libraries in New Haven, Connecticut, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., and New York City, research workers are usually granted ready access to inspect all their holdings of Maughamiana, including manuscript material, and the same is true of the libraries in London and Canterbury.

January 1957, Mr. Alanson donated the original manuscript of *The Trembling of a Leaf*, which was dedicated to him, to the Library of Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. Its Director, Dr. Raymond Swank, called this "the most important literary manuscript Stanford has ever received." Alanson felt that it was worth at least £7,000 at the very minimum and added that he intends to give Stanford his collection of hundreds of letters received over the past forty years from Maugham.

Since the thirties the leading American Maugham scholar has been Richard A. Cordell, Professor of English at Purdue University and for years a reviewer for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, who wrote the first important monograph on Maugham. In addition to the author's own publications, Cordell's collection contains large accumulations of letters, photographs, and miscellaneous personal items. Maugham has shown his appreciation and friendship to him by the presentation of the manuscript of the Preface to *A Writer's Notebook*.

An extremely complete and well-rounded collection has been assembled, over a period of thirty-three years, by Professor Karl G. Pfeiffer of New York University. Dr. Pfeiffer has amassed a profusion of material, including a great many foreign translations which have become quite scarce, and his letters from Maugham have accumulated with the passing of the years. Mr. Maugham has presented to him the original manuscript of his second short story entitled "The Happy Couple."

For many years Maugham was fortunate in having as his American publisher his friend, Nelson Doubleday, and during the Second World War, he resided for long periods on the latter's farm, near Parkers Ferry, Yemassee, South Carolina. In 1944 Maugham presented to him the leather-bound manuscript of his most successful novel, *The Razor's Edge*, written between 1942 and 1944; it is now in the possession of his widow, Mrs. Ellen McCarter Doubleday.

A magnificent Maugham archive is owned by Mr. Jerome R. Zipkin of New York.<sup>1</sup> Among his treasures is the original manu-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Zipkin's collection was exhibited in honour of Maugham's seventy-fifth birthday in the House of Books, 2 West 56th Street, New York. It had been assembled by Capt. Louis Henry Cohn, dealer in first editions, and includes the manuscript of *The Unconquered*, presented by Mr. Maugham to Mr. Zipkin.

#### APPENDIX

script of *The Moon and Sixpence* which he acquired at the auction of Sotheby in London in December 1955 for a price of £2,600. Written from May to August 1918 in Charles Hill Court, Farnham, Surrey, it consists of 282 leaves bound in two volumes in a half morocco case, plus twelve loose leaves containing the original opening of the story (on eleven leaves), followed by a second opening, both of which were entirely cancelled.

It should be pointed out that the last-mentioned archives are private collections and that, for a stranger without proper introduction, it is at present almost impossible to gain access to them.

It is the intention of the Centre of Maugham Studies, founded in 1950 by this writer and now housed at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to aid present and future scholars in their research. It serves as a clearing house for information about Maughamiana, maintaining a file of bibliographical data, and publishing one book a year. In its working collection, Maugham's own writings are well represented, though by no means all in first editions. In addition to many autograph presentation copies, its archives contain many photographs, and an extensive accumulation of critical and biographical studies, among them unpublished European doctoral dissertations. In its collection of foreign translations of Maugham's books there are a number of Japanese and Korean editions. All the items are systematically arranged and completely catalogued, and a definitive bibliography of the vast literature of criticism is in progress. Copies of many Maugham letters have already been deposited, and the collection includes all the letters I have received from Mr. Maugham. It would be impossible to attempt to record, in the limited space available here, all the recipients of Maugham's letters in the U.S.A. Their number is large and many of the letters appear to have been lost, misplaced, or destroyed. Suffice it to mention only one who was not only a relative of Somerset Maugham but a warm and loyal friend of the Centre of Maugham Studies as well.

When Mr. Maugham first went to the United States, in November 1910, he made the acquaintance of the family of a second cousin, Ralph S. Maugham of Tenafly, New Jersey, and of his son, Joseph Beaumont Maugham, Jr., then a youth of eighteen, to whom these letters were addressed. Ralph's father,



Joseph Beaumont, Sr., was born in London in 1835 and went to the U.S.A. in the early fifties to settle in Passaic, New Jersey. The Tuckerton (N. J.) *Beacon*, in an obituary article in 1913, characterises him as:

“scholarly, dignified and courteous; the two latter somewhat after the old school. One of the cherished memories of his boyhood was that of sitting, literally, many times at the feet of the great Thomas Carlyle, between whom and Mr. [Joseph Beaumont] Maugham’s father there existed the warmest friendship, and listening with precocious interest to their discussions.”

These letters, written in New York and Washington, D.C., between 1910 and 1939, are now in the possession of the widow of the addressee, Mrs. Betty Maugham, of Highland Park, New Jersey.

For the student of contemporary English literature much original Maugham material is already available, and when, in the future, critics and scholars plan to engage in research projects dealing with Mr. Maugham’s literary career, it would be wise for them not to overlook these collections which have been brought together in English and American libraries with a great deal of industry, patience and devotion.

## EXHIBITIONS OF MAUGHAMIANA

On April 21, 1946, the Library of Congress opened a display which was the first of its kind ever to be held in the United States. It coincided with Mr. Maugham's first gift to the Library and contained, in addition to the manuscript of *Of Human Bondage*, the original typescript of *A Writer's Notebook*, at that time an unpublished journal by Mr. Maugham which he had prepared from comments and short essays assembled during his long career. Also on display were the M.S. and corrected proofs of his novel, *Then and Now*.

Part of the collection of the Centre of Maugham Studies was exhibited, from February 1 to 10, 1951, at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. This display of manuscripts, first editions, and associated items attracted a great many visitors on February 5, when Professor Richard A. Cordell delivered a lecture on Maugham's career as a man of letters. Among the highlights of this exhibit were the MSS of *Of Human Bondage* and *The Artistic Temperament of Stephen Carey*, lent by the Library of Congress; *Strictly Personal*, lent by the Yale University Library; and the original manuscript, galley proofs with manuscript corrections, and the first of three hundred copies of *The Unconquered*, lent by Mr. Jerome Zipkin. Other items in this exhibition were twenty-five of the first editions, all inscribed, presented by Maugham to Carl Van Vechten, lent by the New York Public Library through the kindness of Mr. Van Vechten and Dr. John D. Gordan, Curator of the Berg Collection, and a revised copy of an address delivered by Mr. Maugham in 1946 in the Library of Congress, with numerous manuscript corrections and annotations in red ink, lent by Mr. Munroe Wheeler, Director of Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art. Finally, there was a considerable selection from the material in the Centre of Maugham Studies, showing a number of critical and biographical studies, translations of Maugham's works, and a pictorial record of his life consisting of some sixty photographs, many of them autographed.

The next exhibition of Maughamiana was arranged in January 1954 by The Times Bookshop in London in honour of Mr. Maugham's eightieth birthday. There were seven autograph manuscripts (*Liza of Lambeth*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, *Cakes and Ale*, *Catalina*, *East of Suez*, and *The Letter*); first or limited editions of fifty-four of his prose works and eighteen of his plays, five books edited by him, some works of criticism, theatre programmes, film stills, producer's copies of broadcast versions of two of his plays, lithographs by Graham Sutherland, a new portrait by Sir Gerald Kelly just after Maugham's seventy-fifth birthday, and a bronze by Sir Jacob Epstein.

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